BIG CYPRESS.

CHAPTER I.

A FATHER DISAPPEARS.

"I MUST say that I am disappointed in that chap," muttered Allan Lawton to himself. As he spoke, he leaned against the trunk of the giant cypress, from which the homestead took its name, and watched a rapidly receding canoe until it it passed beyond his sight around a bend of the mangrove-bordered stream.

"The idea," continued the youth, "of his working with me all this time for money, instead of from friendship and an interest in what we were doing, as he gave me to understand. I might have known better, though, than to expect anything else from the son of such a father, and from a fellow who can never look one straight in the face too. I wish I could follow mother's plan of remembering only the good things we know about people; but, somehow, its lots easier to recall their bad points. I wonder why? Heigho! This is a queer old world, and we seem to have landed

in one of its queerest corners. I wonder what will be the outcome of all this homestead business, anyway?"

Thus, wondering about various things, and expressing his thoughts half aloud to himself, the squarely built, good-looking young fellow turned and walked slowly along a trail that led directly back from the river. It brought him to a small knoll, crowned by an odd-appearing structure, before which a bright fire made a cheerful point of light amid the gathering shadows of the forest. Although the month was November, the youth wore no coat, and the up-rolled sleeves of his flannel shirt displayed a pair of muscular, young arms, tanned to a mahogany brown by the tropic suns of South Florida, in the wilderness of which the Lawtons were endeavoring to establish a new home.

As Allan approached the fire, and the quaint structure that was revealed by its light to be a tiny but most picturesque hut of palmetto thatch, a slender, brown-haired girl, about a year younger than he, who, with a flushed face and perplexed expression was hovering as near the blaze as its heat would permit, called out, "O Allan! How *can* one cook a fish over a bonfire? I can't get anywhere near it to begin with; and, oh, dear! I think this is a horrid way of trying to live!"

"That's only because you don't know how, sister Besty," laughed Allan.

"I'm not besty, I'm worsty!" exclaimed Bessie Lawton petulantly. "What with the horrid gnats driving us away from the *Skimmer*, and the roasting I've got from that blazing fire, and not knowing what to do with this wretched fish, I've lost every shred of good nature, and good temper, and anything else good that I ever had, and I know I'm worse than useless in this horrid place. I persuaded mother to lie down for a little rest, and said I'd get supper. I could, too, if it wasn't for this provoking fish, for we've plenty of other things that don't have to be cooked."

"Where did it come from?" asked Allan, examining, with interest, the fine bass that, nicely cleaned and ready for the fry-pan, lay on a green palmetto leaf.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered his sister. "I found it hanging here where the turkey was the other day, and thought you must have caught it and put it there for a surprise."

"No, I didn't, and I think it must have been left by the one friend we have found in this country who doesn't expect to be paid for his acts of kindness."

"You mean Ul-we?"

"Yes, I mean Ul-we, and I believe he not only

left us this fish, but cleared that trail, and planted those potatoes, and is proving himself the kind of a friend any fellow might be proud to own."

While Allan talked he was also engaged in raking a fine bed of coals from the fire. Above these he soon had a kettle of water boiling, and the fish, together with a few slices of bacon, sputtering in the fry-pan; for, although young in years, he was old in the experiences of camping out.

A few hours later the fire had been extinguished, its vicinity was deserted by those who had so recently gathered about it, and only a patch of blackness, somewhat denser than the enfolding shadows, marked the site of the hut by which the Lawton homestead claim, on the edge of the Florida everglades, was "held down."

Less than a year before, the Lawton's formed, to all appearances, one of the happiest and most prosperous families in a large western city. Seventeen-year-old Allan, who hated study, was about to enter the great manufacturing business carried on by his father; while his sister Bessie, who was an ardent student, was just prepared for college. Mr. Lawton never allowed his business to enter his home, and thus even his idolized wife was kept as ignorant of its details as though she were a stranger. For months she tried in vain to discover the cause of her husband's haggard looks and

evident mental distress; but he always smiled as bravely and cheerfully as possible, while answering: "Nothing, dear, that shall be allowed to worry you, and nothing but what will blow over shortly."

Then one evening he failed to come home, nor was any trace of him to be found afterwards. His clerks had left him at work in the private office. In the morning it was found to be properly closed, with all its contents in perfect order; but its master spirit had departed. For a few days the papers revelled in "the mysterious disappearance of one of our most prominent citizens," and for a few weeks detectives scoured the country in vain. The business that had seemed so prosperous was found to be on the verge of bankruptcy, and vague hints concerning the missing man's methods soon swelled into a torrent of open accusation that his striken family strove in vain to stem. For months they braved the pitiless flood, never for a moment losing faith in their loved one, nor ceasing to look for his return. When they could stand it no longer, they fled, and the places that had known them knew them no more.

CHAPTER II.

SEEKING A LOCATION.

ALLAN LAWTON had spent the last winter of his careless and prosperous days on the Indian River in Florida, and being an enthusiastic sportsman had become captivated with the country. On his most extended hunting trip he had been accompanied by a young Seminole Indian named Ul-we (the tall one), whom he employed as guide. This Indian was remarkably intelligent, spoke English fluently, was a master of woodcraft, and so won the good-will of his young employer that on the departure of the latter for the North he presented his guide with his own rifle, a beautiful Winchester. From Ul-we Allan gained such information concerning the hunting in the country inhabited by the Seminoles, far to the southward between the Bay of Big Water and the everglades, as made him long to visit it. He also heard much of that same region from his white acquaintances, who spoke of it as the great future winter resort and tropical fruit-growing region of the United States. They lamented its inaccessibility, but declared

that railroads and steamboats must penetrate even to its remoteness within a few years, when every acre of its lands would become valuable. Thus, long before misfortune overwhelmed the Lawtons, the everglades had become a familiar topic of conversation with them, and when the grief-stricken mother began to long for some remote place, to which she could fly with her children, it needed but little persuasion on Allan's part to convince her that the wilderness of South Florida would not only offer an asylum, but a chance to retrieve their shattered fortunes.

Mr. Lawton's disappearance took place early in the spring, and through the long summer months his family watched and waited, filled with alternate hope and despair, for his return, or at least for certain news of the fate that had overtaken him. That he had wilfully deserted them, or that he was an embezzler, as many, even, of his alleged friends were quite ready to believe, they would not listen to for an instant. To them he was ever the brave, splendid father who would return to them if alive. This they knew, and nothing could shake their faith; but as time passed, they beheld with dismay the steady shrinking of their slender resources, and realized that something must be done besides the idle nursing of their grief, and the making of fruitless efforts to dis-

cover traces of their lost one. So widespread were the cruel slanders attached to his name, that all Allan's efforts to obtain employment only resulted in disappointment, and a pitiless poverty stared them in the face.

At length, those who found pleasure in discussing the Lawtons' downfall were given a new bit of gossip, by their unannounced departure and a disappearance apparently as mysterious as that of Mr. Lawton himself. Only to old Dr. King, who had remained their stanch friend through all adversity, did the wanderers confide the secret of their destination, and promise to send their address as soon as they should decide upon a location.

A few weeks later, a small Key West schooner beat slowly up the great Florida reef, and at length landed the Lawtons, with their freight, on a little wharf near the mouth of the Coochee River. This wharf belonged to Joel Algrove, himself a recent arrival in that section, but already storekeeper, Indian trader, and land speculator, besides being accounted one of the keenest business men in South Florida. At first this man, whom the Lawtons had been told was the very one to give them all possible information concerning lands, regarded them with a suspicious reserve that boded ill for their future relations. This was, however, effectually cleared away by the sight of a roll of bills,

from which Allan was paying the charter of the schooner, and he at once became profuse in his offers of hospitality and assistance.

In spite of the interest with which Joel Algrove regarded that roll of bills, it was a very small one to represent their all. They had started with but a few hundred dollars, and with each mile of progress toward the wilderness, their journey had grown more expensive as well as more uncomfortable. Still the newcomers were so charmed by the scenes amid which they now found themselves, and which, with their strange tropical beauty, were in such pleasant contrast to the cheerless, autumnal aspect of the saddened home left so far behind, that they were inclined to regard the future with hopeful anticipations.

That very evening they explained to Mr. Algrove their intention of settling in his neighborhood, and made inquiries as to the value of adjacent lands. They had hoped to find these so cheap that even their limited means would enable them to purchase a home, and perhaps make a small speculative investment as well. To their dismay, the prices named were so far in excess of their expectations that the buying of even a single acre of desirable water front would quite exhaust their depleted purse. The truth was that, with his own ends in view, Mr. Algrove

purposely quoted prohibitory prices against all tracts concerning which they made inquiries. After persuading his listeners that these were quite beyond their means, and dilating upon the wonderful future in store for that entire region, the wily speculator directed their thoughts into a new channel. First explaining that all the best lands for agricultural purposes lay back from the coast, in the vicinity of the everglades, he then stated that he knew of one quarter section of this desirable land which was still open to homestead entry, and strongly urged them to become homesteaders. He explained the method by which real estate might thus be acquired, and painted so alluring a picture of the particular place he had in view for them, that, before separating for the night, the Lawtons agreed to go with him the next day, and look at it.

On the following morning, therefore, Mrs. Lawton seated herself with much trepidation in the middle of Allan's canoe, which was the most cherished possession he had saved from the wreck of their former prosperity. It was a Canadian birch, made from a single sheet of bark, and was one that he had already used on the Indian River. There his Seminole guide had been so delighted with its speed and lightness that he had named it Hu-la-lah (the wind), and had tried in vain to

induce Allan to part with it. Now, with its owner in the stern, and Bessie in the bow, both wielding broad-bladed, spruce paddles, the dainty craft shot swiftly up the beautiful Coochee followed by the longing eyes of another would-be purchaser. This was red-haired, cross-eyed, freckle-faced Hiram Algrove who had never before seen a birch canoe, and now thought that to own one must be the height of human happiness. He had already sounded Allan as to the possibility of purchasing the Hu-la-lah, and, in no wise discouraged by her owner's declaration that she was not for sale at any price, now approached his father on the subject. They occupied a rowboat that was also making its way up the Coochee, though far behind the flying birch.

"Won't you buy her for me, dad?"

"Buy what?"

"That there fancy boat trick."

"What you want of such like?"

"Just want her, that's all."

"No; I won't buy her. I ain't got no money to throw away; but maybe if you want her bad I'll find some way to get her in trade."

With this answer Hiram was forced to be content.

In less than an hour our explorers came to the end of smooth water, and reached the foot of a

rocky chute of roaring, tumbling rapids. Above these, and far away, stretched the wet, prairie-like savannas of the everglades. Landing at the foot of the rapids, the party was led by Mr. Algrove a short distance along their edge, and into a cultivated field, the soil of which looked black and fertile. The Lawtons were surprised to see on its farther edge, beneath a clump of cocoanut palms, what appeared to be a group of cottages.

"Here," said Mr. Algrove, halting and waving his hand comprehensively over the broad field and the forest beyond, "is what I consider the prettiest quarter section of vacant land in all Florida, and if you folks listen to my advice, you won't waste no time afore taking possession of it under the homestead laws of the United States."

"But how can we?" inquired Mrs. Lawton. "It looks as though some one already occupied it. Who owns those houses and this field?"

Before the speculator could reply, a strange voice from behind them answered, in excellent English: —

"It is the land of the Ista-Chatte. It is my home and my field; one time it was my father's, now it is mine."

Quickly facing about, the intruders beheld, to their great surprise, a young Indian. He was tall, straight as an arrow, well featured, and was

dressed in full Seminole costume, including the brilliant turban that forms the distinguishing badge of this most southerly tribe. He stood near a clump of cabbage palms from which he had evidently just stepped, and the angry scowl with which he regarded Mr. Algrove showed that he had both heard and understood the trader's words.

CHAPTER III.

LAND OF THE ISTA-CHATTE.

THE sudden appearance upon the scene of the young Indian, and his claim to the land that Mr. Algrove had just declared open to homestead entry, produced a decided but very different effect on each of the various members of the party whom he confronted. Mrs. Lawton and Bessie regarded him with interest not unmixed with apprehension, for he was the first Indian they had ever seen. At the same time they wondered at his manly bearing. It was so different from that of the red men described by the newspapers. Allan uttered an exclamation that might have expressed almost any emotion, and then, suddenly checking it, stared irresolutely at the motionless figure before him.

The trader grew red in the face, and asked angrily, "How's this, Billy? What are you doing here? I thought you were off hunting plume birds. You know I am trying to fill an order from Paris for ten thousand egret plumes!"

"Since he has learned that by the law only

those who are citizens of this country may kill plume birds in Florida, the Ista-Chatte hunts them no more," answered the young Seminole slowly.

This speech recalled to Allan an incident of his previous winter's experience on the Indian River. There his indignation at the ruthless slaughter of birds by the French agent of a Paris millinery firm had been so great that he had looked up the law on the subject and caused the man to be arrested. He now remembered how often he had quoted that particular section of the Florida game laws before the camp fire, and in the presence of his Indian guide.

"Fiddlesticks!" cried the trader. "That law applies only to foreigners, not to folks born and raised right here."

"It says 'citizens of the United States,'" replied the Indian.

"Well, if you ain't a citizen of the United States, what country are you a citizen of?" asked Mr. Algrove impatiently.

"Sten-to-see" (I do not know), was the answer.

"Besides," continued the trader, "that law is a dead letter, anyway, for nobody in this part of the country would lift a finger to enforce it."

"I would!" exclaimed Allan hotly, "and so would every true sportsman in the land."

"I would," said Mrs. Lawton quietly, "for I

regard the wanton destruction of American birds and wild animals as one of the wickedest of crimes."

"So would I," cried Miss Bessie with an indignant flush mantling her pretty cheeks, "for I am a member of the Audubon Society, and pledged not only to refrain from wearing feathers but to use every means in my power to prevent the killing of birds."

"Oh, well," said the discomfited trader, "there is no use arguing the matter. It don't amount to anything, anyway, and is neither here nor there. The question of present interest is, will you take up this homestead or not?"

"How can we," asked Mrs. Lawton in a tone of surprise, "when this young man has just stated that the land is his?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Algrove, "that's a good one. Don't you see, ma'am, that he's an Injun, and don't you know that Injuns can't take up land? He may claim it all he wants to, but he hasn't got a deed for it, and he can't get one; only a citizen of the United States can obtain that. Oh, no, his claim don't amount to nothing, and the land is yours if you only say the word. These Seminoles haint got no rights that white folks is bound to respect."

"Supposing we did enter this homestead and

take possession of it, what would become of this young man and those dependent on him for support?" inquired Mrs. Lawton with an ominous calmness.

"They'd have to move on and squat somewheres else."

"And suppose some one should take a fancy to their new home?"

"Then they'd have to move again. You see, ma'am, an Injun can't be allowed to stand in the way of a white man, and when the one is ready to step in, the other jest nacherly has to step out."

"But what will become of these Indians when all their land is taken up by white men?"

"Oh, the gover'ment will have to look out for 'em, and move 'em onto some reservation out West, where the land aint good for nothing, I reckin."

"*Is-ta lak-sa-tah mas-chay*" (the man lies; it will never be), muttered the young Indian, darting a glance of hatred at the speaker, whose every word he had understood.

"So, ma'am, you see there ain't no reason in the world why you shouldn't take up this bit of land if so be it suits you," continued the trader, without heeding this interruption.

At this Mrs. Lawton's righteous indignation blazed forth. "There is every reason!" she cried.

"Humanity and justice forbid it! Self-respect and common decency forbid it! The law of God, which is as much higher than the law of man as the stars are high above the earth, forbids it! I and my children are poor and friendless, but we have not lost our sense of honor, nor our self-respect. We are neither so degraded nor so cowardly as you seem to imagine, and we would suffer untold privations sooner than rob this Indian of a single acre that is his by divine right, or lift a hand to disturb the home that belongs to him as surely as it did to his fathers before him. So, sir, if this is the only piece of land you have to show us, we may as well return whence we came, and plan some other way of obtaining a home."

As the indignant woman concluded this outburst, both the white man at whom it was directed and the young Seminole stared at her in amazement. Never had the one been forced to swallow such a bitter draught of wholesome truth, and never had the other met so ardent a champion of his cause.

The Indian was the first to speak, and, in the same excellent English that had attracted attention from the outset, he said to Mrs. Lawton:

"If Hok-tee-hat-ke (the white woman) desires land, why not take the next below this place? It is as good, and it is nearer the Big Water. On it

stands Ha-chee-na-ha (the big cypress) the tree of good-fortune."

"Do you know if the land he mentions is vacant and open to homestead entry?" asked Mrs. Lawton turning to the trader.

"I cannot be sure of any of it without reference to my maps," he replied in a surly tone, "and as I have loaned them to a man living up the coast, it will be some time before I can examine them. This is the only piece to which I can guarantee you immediate and full possession."

"And if it were the only bit of land to be had in all the world, I would not take it," was the spirited retort.

"Very well, ma'am, suit yourself, and seeing there's nothing more to be done here, I suppose we might as well be getting along down the river. I've some business to attend to at home, and can't afford to waste any more time over Injuns and Injun cranks."

"Don't let us detain you a moment longer, I pray," said Mrs. Lawton, coldly. "Although we can never possess this beautiful place, I should like to see something more of it before leaving. So, with your permission, we will remain here for awhile; when we have satisfied our curiosity, we can easily make our own way back to your house before dark."

"As you please, ma'am," replied the other, hesitatingly. "I don't like to leave you here along with these Injuns, though, for there's no knowing what might happen. Tell you what I'll do, I'll leave my boy, Hiram, to look out for you. He knows the Injuns, and they know him, so there'll be no danger long's he's 'round."

"I thank you for the offer of so able a protector," answered Mrs. Lawton with formal politeness, "but, under the circumstances, I cannot think of accepting it. If protection should prove necessary, I can confidently rely upon my own son to furnish it. Besides, Mr. Hiram's presence would prove a decided embarrassment on our return, as I could never consent to occupy our canoe with more than two other persons."

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOCATION IS MADE.

BEING thus dismissed by Mrs. Lawton, both the trader and his son were forced to take their reluctant departure, leaving the homestead seekers in company with the Indian, whose appearance upon the scene had so materially altered the situation. The trader, who felt very bitter against him for having interfered with his plans, called him "English Billy," on account of his command of the white man's tongue, and because it was against his own principles to use or recognize any Indian name, no matter how euphonious or easy of pronunciation it might be.

Allan Lawton, however, seemed to know the young Indian by another name; for, no sooner were the Algroves out of hearing than he extended his hand and exclaimed, "Ul-we, old fellow, this is, indeed, a bit of luck! But why didn't you recognize me? It can't be that you forget old friends so quickly."

"Un-cah (yes), Ul-we saw his friend and knew him when he landed, but he was with a bad man,

who would steal the land of the Ista-Chatte. When you did not speak I thought you were ashamed to know me. Now I have learned better, and am sorry that I gave you wrong thoughts."

"Indeed, Ul-we, I am proud to know you, and so are my mother and sister, but for certain reasons I did not care to have those others suspect that we had ever met before. Mother, this is Ul-we of whom I have told you so much, the Indian who speaks better English than any other Seminole of the 'glades.'"

On being thus introduced both Mrs. Lawton and Miss Bessie shook hands with the young Seminole, and thereby gained his enduring friendship; for no white woman had ever treated him with such courtesy before. Then they accompanied him to the huts beneath the cocoanut palms that formed his home, where they met his mother, sister, and younger brother. None of these could speak more than a few words of English, but all were glad to welcome the strangers for Ul-we's sake.

The Lawtons were intensely interested in what they saw here, as well as amazed at the abounding evidences of comfort and plenty displayed in this home of those whom they had been taught to regard as savages. The climax was reached when Halissee, Ul-we's pretty sister, who seemed of

about the same age as Bessie Lawton, shyly led the white girl to a small hut that stood apart from the others, and proudly pointed to something that stood inside.

"I declare, mother, if it wasn't a sewing-machine!" exclaimed the girl when she returned to where the others were standing; "and the work that little squaw has done on it is simply beautiful! The idea of calling these people savages! It seems to me that considering the conditions under which they live they are about as civilized as we are. I only hope our homestead will be as comfortable as this place."

This mention of homesteads recalled the business that had brought them up the river, and Allan began to question Ul-we concerning the place he had mentioned. He promised to guide them to it, and did so, after they had partaken of a lunch of baked sweet potatoes, roasting ears, and cornbread, all prepared by Halissee over an open fire. The trail along which he led them wound for nearly half a mile through a dense hammock of tropical trees, shrubs, and interlacing vines, alive with birds, and brightened by the vivid blossoms of innumerable air-plants. It brought them to a small open savanna near the center of which rose a tree-crowned knoll. Its rounded summit commanded a fascinating view of

pine-shaded vistas, bits of prairie-like everglade stretching to a blue horizon, and of near-at-hand river waters gleaming in dappled sunshine. Directly in front towered the giant cypress that had from time immemorial given the place its name. To their ears came the musical dashings of the Coochee rapids blended with the ceaseless murmurs of the encircling pine forests.

"Here," said Ul-we, "in former years dwelt Iathloe, chief of the Uchees, but since he lay down in the big sleep, no man has lived in the place, nor has fire been lighted on this spot. The Ista-Chatte may not claim it for his own, but it will fall to the first white man who may camp here until he shall make a field that shall yield fruit. If my white brother wants this land let him take it quickly; for if he does not, another will."

"I doubt if we could find a better or more beautiful location," said Mrs. Lawton.

"It is simply too lovely for anything!" cried Bessie enthusiastically.

"This place is exactly such a one as we have been looking for!" exclaimed Allan. "We are ever so much obliged to you, Ul-we, for bringing us here, and I'll come back here to-morrow to begin work on some sort of a shanty with which to hold down our claim to it."

"To-day is here," answered the Indian, "to-

morrow may be many moons. The white man who dwells by the Big Water would take it for his own if he had not already claimed all that he may. He did not bring you here, for he wishes to save the place of the big cypress for his boy. So he has said when the Ista-Chatte have been near to hear his words. Now he is angry that you should know of it and will bring some other who will obey him to build a camp and make a field. If the home of Iathloe is to be the home of my white brother he must take it now, and not leave it until he has slept on it for one night. Then he may hold it against all others. Such is the law of the Ista-Hatke (white man)."

"Then let us stay here and claim the place from this very minute!" cried impulsive Allan. "It will be the biggest kind of a lark to camp out for a night just as we are, and so win a title to our future home. What do you say, mother mine? Are you game for it?"

"Yes, momsey, please do!" urged Bessie who had never in her life slept from under a roof, or in other than a regular bed.

"But how can we, you crazy children?" objected Mrs. Lawton. "Without shelter, bedding, or food what would become of us before morning?"

"Don't you worry about any of those things, mother," said Allan. "If you'll only give the

word, and Ul-we will help, we'll fix you in as tight a little house as you ever laid eyes on, before sundown. Maybe it won't be as large as some, but I'll guarantee you'll fall in love with it. I rather think we can knock up a camp right here equal to the one we lived in on the Lokohatchie last winter; eh, Ul-we?"

"Un-cah. Fix um good!" replied the Indian heartily.

"And that was fine enough even for the queen of mothers, who deserves, and shall always have, the very best of everything her loving subjects can procure," continued the boy. "As for eat and drink, there is plenty where we just came from, and I am sure Ul-we will sell us enough to keep starvation at bay until morning. Won't you, Ul-we?"

"No," was the unexpected answer. Then, smiling at the surprised and grieved expression on Allan's face, the young Seminole continued, "The Ista-Chatte does not sell to his friends, for all that he has is theirs."

"Of course I might have known you would say that!" cried Allan. "So there you are, queen of mothers, fully provided with the best the land affords or that heart could desire, if you will only accept of it. What, then, is your royal pleasure? Shall we forthwith proceed to annex this home-

stead of the Ha-chee-na-ha, and prepare to hold it against all comers, or shall we relinquish it to the land-grabber who dwells by the Big Water?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Lawton still hesitating and glancing at Bessie. "I suppose, after all, though, there is nothing to disturb us out here any more than at Mr. Algrove's, and so perhaps we might try the experiment for a single night," which remark showed how very ignorant she was of the disturbing possibilities known to a South Florida wilderness.

CHAPTER V.

PREPARING TO HOLD THE CLAIM.

THE moment Mrs. Lawton's reluctant consent to camp for the night on that spot was obtained, the knoll became the scene of a busy activity. Allan had brought a light axe with him from the canoe, and a keen-bladed sheath-knife hung from Ul-we's belt. Being thus provided with all the tools necessary for the style of house-building, at which the latter was most expert, the young men at once set to work to construct a South Florida hunting-camp. While Ul-we was cutting seven stout posts, and a number of slender saplings for the frame, Allan cut and brought to the camp site hundreds of broad cabbage palmetto leaves. He showed his mother and sister how to tear a few of these into strips, and plait them into binding lengths. Within a couple of hours the materials for a structure eight feet square by eight feet high in front, and sloping to a height of but four feet at the rear, were collected. Then two of the long and two of the short posts, all notched at their upper ends, were driven solidly into the ground

beneath the spreading branches of a great, wild fig or American banyan tree, so as to form an eight-foot square. Another long post, also notched, was driven on the line of the front, and but two feet from one of the corner posts already set. These two thus formed the frame for an entrance or doorway.

Two heavy poles resting in the notched tops of the uprights, with two more lying across these at right angles, and firmly bound to them by palmetto withes, outlined the frame of the roof. Across these, and parallel to the front of the hut, were laid a number of slender saplings about a foot apart, each being tied into place with the useful palmetto strips. Along the sides other poles were similarly arranged in horizontal rows, until the structure resembled a big, slatted cage. The side, front, and rear walls were now thatched with palmetto leaves. The first row of these was tied, stems up and tips down, to the lowest pole; another was tied to the pole above, so that half its width overlapped the first, and other rows were added in the same manner until the four walls were completely enclosed, save for the door space left in front. The roof was thatched in the same way, beginning at its lower edge. A little curtain, or porch roof, of poles and thatch was thrown out from the front; this extra bit of

elegance being, as Allan said, to show that this was no hunter's cabin, but a regular house fit to be occupied by a family and hold down a homestead claim.

At one side of the interior a springy platform of poles was raised on logs a foot from the ground and covered deep with palmetto leaves. These were overspread in turnwith a layer of Spanish moss, and above the whole was thrown a blanket which, with three cushions, belonged to the canoe.

"There, mother," exclaimed Allan when this first bit of house furnishing was completed, "I call that simply immense, and know that after once sleeping on it you will regret not always having had a bed just like it."

While he and Bessie were putting the finishing touches to this "couch of luxury" as the former termed it, Ul-we and one of his younger brothers, named Ko-wik-a (the gopher), returned from their own camp with a supply of provisions, half a dozen gourds for holding water, and a roll of deer-skins, two of which were used to make a curtain for the doorway. The two Indians helped collect an ample supply of firewood, and then bidding their new neighbors good-night, left them to the undisturbed occupancy of their claim.

After supper as the Lawtons sat before their camp fire, and gazed into the rapidly changing

pictures formed by its leaping flames, they talked in low tones of the strangeness of their situation, and wondered what its future would bring forth.

"How incredible it seems," remarked Allan, "that we should be Florida homesteaders, and that our mother, of all people, should be actually camping out in a wilderness of Indians and alligators."

"Yes," answered Bessie, "and how little we were thinking of such a thing only twenty-four hours ago. It certainly isn't what I, for one, expected, though, and I must confess I can't see what we are to do with ourselves here, or how we are going to make a living, or what good is going to come of it all."

The poor girl was tired from the day's excitement and hard work, besides being bewildered by her surroundings, and inclined to be frightened by the darkness and the strange noises of the wilderness.

"Why, Besty!" exclaimed her brother, "that doesn't sound a bit like you. Now it seems to me as though we were getting on swimmingly, and that things are panning out just about as we want them. We expected to have to buy land, and instead of that we are going to get it for nothing, or almost nothing, for our application at the land office will cost only fifteen dollars. After it is

filed, all we have to do is live here for five years, by which time our quarter section is certain to be worth a handsome sum of money, and then we shall own it, or if we choose, we can commute at the end of fourteen months and gain a title to the whole hundred and sixty acres by paying two hundred dollars. As for making a living, there are plenty of ways for doing that. I can hunt and fish, or we might make starch as the Indians do, and we can always raise vegetables not only for our own use but for shipment North at the time when they bring the very highest prices. Then, after awhile, we will have a pineapple crop and ——"

"Pineapples!" interrupted Mrs. Lawton. "Do they grow in this country?"

"Of course! Haven't I told you of the fortunes being made from pineapples up on the Indian River? They grow finely on the keys, too, so there is no reason why they shouldn't do well here. Oh, yes; that is one of the most important things, and I'm going to begin at once to get some land ready for pines."

"How long will it be before you get your first crop?" asked Bessie.

"Well, I believe the slips come into bearing during the second year after they are set out," replied Allan a little hesitatingly.

"And in the meantime we can live on our expectations, or I can earn enough for our support by teaching the Indians French and music, or by giving recitations to an audience of pine trees, or by doing any one of the numberless simple and genteel things by which poor girls, who have seen better days, always manage to win fame and fortune, in books. An education is such a particularly useful thing to have in the wilderness!"

"It is a valuable possession anywhere and under any circumstances, dear," said the mother gently, "and I have no doubt you will find yours of great use even here. As for supporting ourselves, Allan is quite right; we shall manage to do it somehow, though it may not be by any of the means that he suggests. It is certain, however, that those who are willing to work can always find plenty to do. It is also certain that He who has led us to this strange place has done so with a purpose that will be disclosed in His good time. Even if we had no other object in view than the making of a home for the dear one who has left us for a season, but who provided us with a happy home for so many years, is not that alone a splendid incentive to work?"

"Indeed it is, momsey, dear!" cried Bessie, penitently, "and we will make a beautiful home for him right here in this lovely wilderness, where

there is nothing to remind him of the sorrows and trials he bore so bravely for our sake."

For some time longer they talked of the loved one whom they had faith to believe would come again to them. Then, as the fire burned low, and a chill crept into the air, Mrs. Lawton and Bessie sought the rude but comfortable couch prepared for them, while Allan, scorning such luxury, threw himself on a bed of palmetto leaves and deerskins spread on the ground just inside the door of the hut, and quickly fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WILDERNESS BY NIGHT.

In spite of her unwonted surroundings, Bessie Lawton soon followed her brother's example and fell asleep; but the poor mother, who, for her children's sake, had maintained so brave and cheerful a front, now became a prey to the terrors of her situation, to such an extent that sleep was out of the question. For hours she lay awake, listening with strained senses to the uncanny night sounds of that southern wilderness. From the river, above the roar of its rapids, came deep bellowings sounding so much like those of angry bulls that Mrs. Lawton imagined them to proceed from a herd of wild cattle. She wondered if at any moment they might not stampede and come rushing down on the frail structure that sheltered her. Besides the bellowings there came from the river unexplained snortings, splashings, and croakings, interrupted every now and then by agonized shrieks. The startling cry of a great hoot-owl, uttered within a few feet of where she lay, almost caused her to scream with terror; while the

quavering trill of a little screech owl, perched in the fig tree above her, suggested melancholy forebodings. Strange rustlings, and scratchings, and sharp little squeaks from all parts of the hut added to her undefined fears. Every now and then *things* dropped to the carpet of crisp leaves with which the earthen floor of the hut was covered, and, after a moment of surprised silence, rustled away with a sound suggestive of snakes.

A dozen times the poor woman was on the point of calling out and awakening her children; but she always resolutely restrained the inclination, and suffered in silence rather than disturb them. At length, however, there came a series of noises, more terrifying than any of the others. There was a swish of branches, and a snapping of dried twigs as though from the passage of some large animal. Then the trembling listener heard heavy footfalls coming closer and closer. It was a panther or a bear! She knew it was; or possibly one of those awful bulls whose bellowings had so alarmed her earlier in the night.

Whatever it was it had nearly reached the hut when the terrified woman almost shrieked: —

"Allan, Allan! Your gun quick! It's a bear! I know it is!"

At the same moment, she sprang to the door-

way of the hut, and tearing aside its deerskin curtain peered wildly out into the darkness.

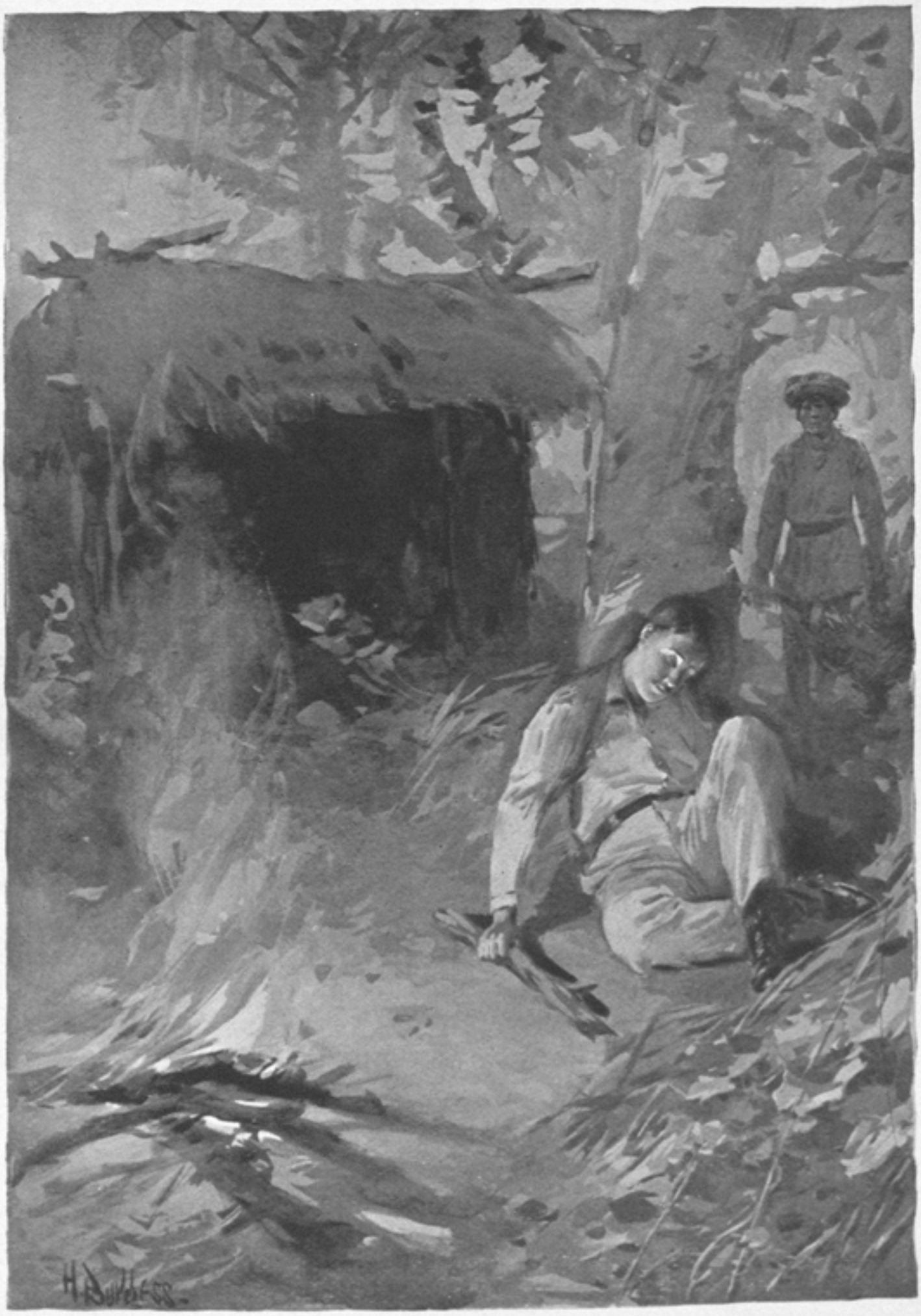
"Why don't you shoot? There, hear it?" she cried in almost inarticulate tones to her son who, only half awake, stood beside her, listening in bewilderment to the rapidly receding sounds of heavy footsteps and crashing bushes.

"Why, mother, dear, what is it? What has frightened you so? You are all of a tremble. I can't shoot, because you objected to having the rifle in the canoe, you know, and so I left it behind. Now wait a minute, until I mend the fire, and then tell us all about it."

By this time, Bessie was also trying to soothe her frightened mother with caresses and reassuring words. In this she was so successful, that when Allan re-entered the hut, leaving a brisk blaze outside to hold the night shadows at a respectful distance, Mrs. Lawton was able to tell them of the many things that had made her night one of wakeful terror. As she described the sounds from the river, Allan laughingly explained that they were the harmless bellowings of alligators, and the puffings of porpoises that, with sharks and many other inhabitants of the salt water, frequently make their way into the fresh water of rivers. He fancied that the heavy splashings were also caused by these or possibly by some huge but timid

manatee feeding on the river grasses. The cries and shrieks he said were those of harsh-voiced night birds, or of others who protested against being eaten by prowling wild cats or coons. As for the owls, he thought they were probably attracted to the vicinity of the hut by the presence of field mice who were rustling in and out of its leafy walls, and uttering squeaks of rejoicing at the discovery of so fine a place in which to build nests. The things that dropped, he said, were only friendly little chameleons, or the equally harmless but more unpleasant wood roaches, that in South Florida attain such great size as to be very annoying.

The only sounds the young woodsman could not satisfactorily explain were those to which he, as well as his mother, had listened while they receded from the vicinity of the camp. Although he was perplexed and worried by them, he was very careful not to let this appear. He made as light as possible of them instead, and declared that, in spite of its alarming noises, the South Florida wilderness was an infinitely safer place in which to spend a night than a great city with its fires, burglars, and unnumbered forms of accident. By talking thus reassuringly and confidently, and after promising to keep the fire blazing brightly until daylight, Allan finally induced his mother



UL-WE BRINGS A PRESENT TO THE CAMP.

to again lie down, and try to obtain a few hours of sleep. As for Bessie, she was already so sleepily yawning and blinking that no urging was necessary to send her back to bed at the same time.

Both the inmates of the hut were soon peacefully sleeping; and, after keeping manfully awake for an hour, Allan also yielded to the all-powerful influence, and sitting with his back to a tree trunk fell fast asleep, still grasping a stick that he had intended to throw on the fire.

Daybreak found the little camp buried in a profound slumber, as did Ul-we, the Seminole, who glided noiselessly from the shadowy hammock with the first flush of dawn. He brought a wild turkey that he had shot on its distant roost the evening before, and which he thus hastened to present to his new neighbors. He also wished to tell them that he was going on a deer hunt that day, and hoped to bring them plenty of venison before night. This bit of information he did not deliver, for Allan was sleeping so soundly that he hesitated to disturb him, and as no sound came from the hut, the young Indian hung his offering to a projecting branch above Allan's head and then stole away as noiselessly as he had come.

An hour later Allan awoke with a start to find that he had a crick in his neck, and felt so seedy generally that he decided to go to the river for a

plunge in its cool waters before waking the others, or beginning preparations for breakfast. He carried out this intention and departed without noticing the addition to their larder left by Ul-we.

A few minutes later, as he hurried back to camp wearing an anxious and bewildered expression of countenance, he found Bessie standing outside the hut gazing admiringly at Ul-we's present.

"Isn't it a beauty, Allan?" she cried, as she caught sight of her brother. "Whose is it? and where did it come from?"

"I'm sure I don't know," was the answer. "This is the first time I've seen it. Perhaps the one who left it here is the same person who has borrowed our canoe."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Hu-la-lah is not where I left her last evening, nor can I see a trace of her in any direction," answered Allan soberly.

CHAPTER VII.

A SOUTH FLORIDA LAND-GRABBER.

ALTHOUGH Joel Algrove had not lived in South Florida more than two years at the time of the Algroves' arrival, he had managed, in one way or another, to acquire title to considerable land. He believed that a great future was in store for that section of tropical wilderness, and bent all his energies in the direction of preparing for it by obtaining control of as much real estate as possible. He had homesteaded and pre-empted, bought whatever was for sale cheap, and, by various means, placed many of his poorer neighbors so deeply in his debt that sooner or later much of their land must come into his possession.

His store was merely an aid to his land schemes, and as the Indians of the everglades possessed no land that he could obtain from them in exchange for goods, he would gladly have seen them removed to some distant part of the country. To aid in bringing this about, he was not above starting rumors, that he knew would grow as they travelled, of Indian outrages, or of dropping

vague hints of what the Indians might do if once aroused. Moreover he did his best to arouse them by persuading newcomers to locate on their lands and drive them from their homes. He also encouraged such Indians as he could influence to a widespread destruction of game and plume birds by buying everything of the kind they brought in. In this he had a threefold purpose. He could sell at a handsome profit all the hides, horns, and plumes thus obtained. The Indians were thus rapidly though ignorantly destroying their chief source of revenue and must soon be reduced to a condition of want that would attract attention in Washington. Above all, their destruction of game was arousing indignation among the white settlers, who wanted it for themselves.

For all this the trader was not regarded as a bad man. He possessed what the world calls "an easy conscience," but he was careful not to overstep the bounds of the law. He was effusively cordial to newcomers if they brought money with them, and exhibited a flattering interest in their affairs. He had long regarded the tract of land marked by the big cypress as being particularly desirable, and had planned to reserve it, if possible, as a homestead for his son Hiram when the latter should become of age. If settlers came in so fast that it was in danger of being taken up,

he meant that it should be claimed by some one whom he could control, and from whom the property would eventually fall into his hands. For the carrying out of this plan he had already persuaded an ignorant Bahama negro, Salem Sandig by name, to apply for naturalization papers, and fired him with the ambition of becoming a land owner.

He had ever pointed out the big cypress homestead as a most desirable one for Salem to take up, and had spoken of it so often as the "Sandig place" that the negro finally came to regard it as his property. He would have entered into actual possession, and settled on it long since, but for one thing. Like all ignorant people, white as well as black, Salem hated and feared Indians. Thus, so long as Ul-we, the Seminole, dwelt in the neighborhood of the big cypress, nothing could induce this particular American citizen to take up a residence on the land that he still fondly hoped to own some day.

This being the case, Joel Algrove became more desirous for the removal of Ul-we and his family than for that of any other Indians, and cast about him to see how it might be accomplished. When the Lawtons arrived and he found that he could persuade them to become homesteaders, he believed he had found a way for the carrying out of

his plans. He fancied that these newcomers would gladly settle on land, much of which was already under cultivation, without a thought of the Indians who would thus be forced to seek a residence elsewhere. Then Sandig could enter into possession of the adjoining homestead, and eventually both tracts of land could, by skilful manipulation, be added to the Algrove property.

The speculator had never heard of such sentiments as were expressed by Mrs. Lawton when she indignantly refused to rob an Indian of his home, even though she had a legal right to do so. It was a blow to his well-conceived scheme for which he was not prepared, and for the moment it staggered him. When he heard Ul-we suggest that the big cypress place might be homesteaded, and when the Lawtons, coolly dismissing him, decided to remain behind and look at it, he was filled with wrath. The appearance of the young Indian, whom he supposed to be far away, and his refusal to hunt plume birds were unpleasant surprises to the trader, but, had he known of the friendship already existing between Ul-we and Allan Lawton his uneasiness would have been even greater than it was.

Mr. Algrove at once realized the necessity not only of forming new plans but of carrying them out immediately. Thus as he sat moodily in the stern

of the boat that his son Hiram rowed down the river, he was too busily engaged in thought to waste time in conversation. This was, however, nothing unusual, for Joel Algrove was noted for keeping his questionable schemes to himself, and never discussing them even with his only son. "Time enough for taking Hi into partnership," he would say, "when he comes of age. He's got a soft streak in his make-up now that might lead him to throw away some of our best chances, but it'll harden into good business sense after a while. Queer thing for a boy of mine to have, too, but I reckon he got it along of his mother, for she was powerful soft, and no mistake."

Only once on their way home did Hiram break in on his father's reflections. Then he asked, as though following out some perplexing train of thought: —

"Do you think it's really right, dad, to take a Injun's land?"

"Right? Of course it is! Gover'ment allows it and what gover'ment allows must be right, cause gover'ment makes the law and long's you keep inside the law you're bound to be right."

"But don't gover'ment make no laws for Injuns?"

"Now, Hiram, what fool questions you do ask! Why in the name er nation should gover'ment

make law for Injuns? They hain't got no vote."

"No more I hain't got no vote, but gover'-ment —"

"Oh, come! Let up! and don't pester me. I'm too busy thinking to tend to your foolishness!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SALEM SANDIG'S SCARE.

THE naturalized black citizen, who fancied himself to be the owner of Big Cypress, was not at home when Mr. Algrove visited his forlorn shanty for the purpose of conferring with him, nor did he put in an appearance until nearly midnight. Then his daughter Venus informed him of the trader's impatience to see him, and, in spite of the lateness of the hour, hurried him off to the latter's house. Soon afterwards a boat containing the two men shot out from the Algrove wharf, and was headed up the river through the mysterious shadows of the night.

The white man had watched anxiously for the return of the Lawtons, and had been rendered very uneasy by their non-appearance.

"They've either got lost, which I don't see how they could, or they're spending the night in that Injun camp, which I don't see how they could neither," he remarked to his companion after the boat was well under way. "Hit look suspicious though, any way you put it, and they're after your land sure as shooting."

"Don yer say dat ar, Boss, don yer now. Dey sholy haint de kin of folkses ter go stealin' a po' man's lan'!"

"Pshaw, Salem! Folks after land don't mind whose land they gets, long's they can get a title to go with it. But I'm your friend in this business, and we'll head 'em off yet. Like as not they're calculating to run up some kind of a shanty, or maybe stick up a tent on the place to-morrow, and sleep there to-morrow night. They won't do it to-night, for they haint sent down the river for no bedding, nor grub, nor nothing to make 'em comfortable, and you know delicate folks like them Lawton wimmen ain't going to rough it like you or me might. Special when they don't know as there's airy occasion for hurrying. Ef they had er come down river, I'd er headed 'em off some way, so they wouldn't have come back till to-morrow, and long's they haint, we'll head 'em off, anyway.

"We'll stop at the cypress, and snake along to that bit of rising ground beyond. Then we'll start a little fire and lay by till daylight. You'll have to sleep, or make believe to, so's I can swear I seen you sleeping on the place. Come day, we'll run up a palmetto shanty, then after you and your family has slept in it one night, and you've made your application to the land office, you needn't go a-nigh the place again for six months, if you don't

want to, enduring which time no man can't touch it. Afore them six months is out, we'll conjure up some way of getting red of them Injuns you're so skeered of, and you can step into possession of your property as easy as slipping down stream. See?"

"Yes, sah, I sees; but sposin'——"

"I tell you there isn't any sposing about it. It's all plain sailing."

"Scuse *me*, boss, but 'pears like dey's sposin's to ebbery case. Now sposin' dem red Injuns comes some night er shooting, an' er yellin', an' er burnin', an' makin' funerals ob me, an' Wenie, an' my ole ooman, wha den?"

"Why," exclaimed the trader enthusiastically, "in that case troops would be sent down here and every Injun in the glades would be cleared out or removed so they wouldn't bother us no more."

"But whar'd I be, an' Wenie, an' de ole ooman?"

"You? Oh, I forgot you! Why you'd escape somehow; but if you didn't you'd be a glorious sacrifice for the good of the whole community, and your memory would be honored by unborn generations."

"Scuse *me*, boss, but I hain't hankerin' to be no sacerfice ner ——"

"Oh, well! what's the use of talking such foolishness? I tell you the Injuns'll be sent clear back into the glades, and some good man'll be settled twixt you and them afore ever you have to actually live on the Cypress place."

In spite of these assurances, poor, cowardly Salem noted the appearance, from out of the enfolding blackness, of the great tree that marked their landing place with genuine trepidation. His fears were increased when, upon landing, they discovered Allan's canoe drawn up among the bushes, and he would have retreated into the boat but for the stern command of his companion to go ahead.

"There's no backing out now, Salem," remarked the white man. "We're in for this thing, and we've got to put her through. Just what that canoe means I can't tell, but if it means that young Lawton is trying to hold this claim down by sleeping on it, he'll find himself getting left. He ain't of age, so he can't take up no homestead. Hit's got to be filed in his mother's name, and she's the one that's got to sleep on it afore they can file an application. Now it isn't likely that a delicate female like she is would sleep anywhere in the woods without airy chance of preparation, let alone a shanty, which that young dude wouldn't know how to build any more'n a fish. So if any-

one's sleeping here, it must be him alone. If he is, we'll just go and sleep along side of him. When it comes time to wake up, we'll see who's slept to most purpose, a kid like he is, or a full-grown man like you be."

Thus conversing as they stumbled onward through the forest blackness, the newcomers did not discover the expiring embers of the Lawtons' camp fire until they were close upon it. At the same moment both suppressed exclamations of amazement at beholding the dim outlines of a house or shanty disclosed by its faint light.

More startling even than this discovery was the shrill cry of terror that rang out from the shanty as they stood within a few feet of it. The cry was in a woman's voice, and in it the words "gun" and "shoot" were distinctly audible.

Now Salem Sandig had no use for a gun, especially when it was in other hands than his and pointed towards him. But on this occasion his retreat was no more precipitate than that of his white and presumably braver companion. They did not pause until, out of breath, they reached the river, sprang into their boat, and had put a safe distance between themselves and the shore.

"Looks like dem folkses powerful wideawake sleepers, boss," remarked Salem at length.

It almost seemed to the white man that there was a chuckle in the negro's voice. It is likely that there was, for he was secretly delighted that his obligation to pass a night in that dreaded place was removed, even though his chances for owning the big cypress homestead went with it.

"Yah!" grunted the trader. "They're smart, them Yankees be. They suttinly do 'pear to have the best of the sleeping for this night, at any rate. That voice was the voice of a woman, and of a white woman, and of the onliest woman round here that can hold down that claim. They couldn't have put up that shanty, though, without help, and it must be that pesky young Injun, English Billy, that showed 'em how. If I don't fix him for this trick, and nip that friendship in the bud, my name's not Algrove. I'll begin this very minute, too. Pull in for the shore."

"Boss, yo' sholy ain't gwine run butt agin dat ar gun?" began the negro, in a tone of entreaty.

"Pull in for the shore, I tell you!" interrupted the other, in so fierce a tone that poor Salem was fain to obey the order.

A few minutes later Allan Lawton's beloved canoe had been dragged into the water, made fast to the boat, and under Joel Algrove's direction, the latter was being rowed still further up stream by the reluctant Sandig.

CHAPTER IX.

A CONFUSION OF TONGUES.

WHEN Allan Lawton announced to his sister Bessie that the canoe had disappeared, she thought he must be mistaken. "How can it have gone?" she asked incredulously. "You fastened it securely last evening, didn't you?"

"Fastened it? Yes, and hauled it out on the bank besides, so that it couldn't possibly have got away by itself."

"Then, if it is really gone, some one must have taken it."

"That's what it looks like."

"But who could have taken it? I have only heard two persons express any great desire to own it, Ul-we and Hiram Algrove."

"I am certain Ul-we wouldn't do such a thing."

"And I," said Bessie decidedly, "don't believe that Algrove boy would. His face isn't handsome to look at, but I believe it's an honest face, and so does mother."

While thus talking, the brother and sister

walked to the place where the Hu-la-lah had been left.

"There is where she lay," said Allan, pointing to the imprint left by the canoe in the soft earth.

"And here are footprints," added Bessie, who was examining the ground with the instinct of a trailer.

"They are probably mine," replied Allan. "I walked about here a good deal, both last evening and this morning. They show the mark of boot-heels, too."

"Not all of them," said the girl stooping to examine the evidence before her more closely. "Here is the print of a bare foot. There is another, and here are others!" she exclaimed excitedly, pointing here and there.

"So there are, and they must have been made by an Indian, for they are the only ones who go barefooted around here."

As Allan spoke, a suspicion of his friend forced itself into his mind, but he would not put it into words.

When they returned to the hut they found their mother standing outside, and anxiously awaiting them. She was as distressed and puzzled as they over the disappearance of the canoe. In it she also found a new cause for alarm, and declared that, while she still thought they ought

to try and hold the homestead, she would never willingly pass another such night as the last on it.

"The next time I sleep here," she said, "it must be in a regular house and behind a door that can be locked against both the wild beasts and the thieves that seem to haunt the place."

"So you shall have a house, mother!" cried Allan. "You shall have a regular fort, and I'll go to work on it the minute I find the canoe; but we must have a hunt for it first. I am going to get Ul-we to carry us down to the mouth of the river in his dug-out, and then go with me in search of the Hu-la-lah. I guess I'll go right over and speak to him now while you and Besty are setting the breakfast table."

Thus making as light as possible of the situation, the active young fellow set off on a run in the direction of Ul-we's camp. He was impatient to reassure himself that his friend was still to be trusted, and to be rid of the rankling suspicion aroused by the sight of those footprints.

The sounds of laughter and light-hearted chatter pervading that pleasant Seminole camp, the happy voices of children, and the familiar whirr of Halissee's sewing-machine that seemed so strangely out of place amid such surroundings, were hushed as the white lad approached the home of his Indian friend. A flea-bitten cur snarled at

him, but was promptly "chunked" into a yelping retreat by little Ko-wik-a, who as the eldest male occupant of the camp stood manfully forth to meet the newcomer. The other children scuttled away into the scrub like a covey of young partridges, while the women sat motionless and silent, with downcast eyes. A custom of their tribe forbade them to speak to a white man so long as a masculine representative of their own race was on hand to talk for them.

Paying no attention to the child, but addressing his question to Ul-we's mother, Allan asked: "Where is Ul-we? I want to see him."

The woman never even looked up; but Ko-wik-a piped out: "Un-cah (yes), Ul-we."

Thus forced to recognize the little chap's presence and the importance of his position, Allan directed his next remark to him.

"Ul-we, your brother, where is he? Has he gone away?"

"Un-cah, Ul-we, Hi-e-pas, pah-yah-yo-kee, e-tcho, hin-dle-ste un-cah," was the bewildering answer.

As Allan was wondering whether it would be worth his while to pursue his inquiries any farther, a musical voice said:

"Ul-we gone hunt e-tcho, catch um plenty; bime-by come."

Glancing quickly to where the women sat, Allan caught sight of a faint smile just disappearing from pretty Halissee's dimpled face, while on her mother's was a mingled expression of displeasure and alarm.

"Oh, so Ul-we has gone deer-hunting, has he? Will he be back before night?" asked the lad, addressing the Indian girl who seemed to be the only one in the camp able to speak English.

He might as well have spoken to a graven image for all the attention the women paid him. Only bare-legged little Ko-wik-a, anxious to have his position as temporary head of the family recognized, answered shrilly: —

"Un-cah, Ul-we!"

"All right. I'm much obliged. Good-morning," said Allan, unconsciously lifting his cap as he turned away.

Halissee laughed, a low rippling laugh, and wondered why the Ista-hatke-chee (young white man) should make such a funny motion.

Her mother knew; for at the trader's store she had seen other white men lift their hats to white women. When she told Halissee of this, and explained as well as she was able the significance of the action, the Seminole girl was greatly pleased. She wondered if it were a sign that she bore any resemblance to the beautiful Hock-to-

chee-hat-ke (young white girl) whom she had so greatly admired, and wished she could be like, the day before.

All the way back to his own camp Allan kept wishing that Ul-we had not gone off at the very time of Hu-la-lah's disappearance, and striving against the feeling that the two events could be in any way connected. As he drew near the hut in which he had left his mother and sister, he was surprised to hear the voice of a man. When he came in sight of the speaker, and saw that it was Mr. Algrove, he wondered greatly how the trader happened to know just where to find them so early in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

HERE, THERE, AND GONE AGAIN.

THE speculator greeted Allan effusively, and insisted on shaking hands as he exclaimed:

"My dear boy, I do congratulate you on your pluck and energy, I do indeed! You see, I was so almighty anxious at you all staying away over night that I started by first break o' day to come up and see what had become of you. As I was just saying to your good mother, for her and Miss Bessie to pass a night out here in the woods 'mong wild savages and wild beasts shows grit such as I wouldn't have believed was to be found in a female woman. And for you to get this shanty run up in the short time you did, and then to persuade the ladies that 'twas their dooty to spend a night in it, shows industry and a way of taking hold of things that puts us easy-going Southerners to shame; yes, sir, it reely does. To think that you and your ma have already gone and homesteaded a piece of land that you didn't know existed twenty-four hours ago! Well, well! it is surprising! it suttinly is surprising! Now,

all you've got to do is to come down to my house and let me fill out your application,— I'm a deputy, you know,— and then take your own time about moving out here to live. Of cose, I don't suppose your ma and your sister, or even you, would care to come up here and settle yet awhile."

"Why not?" asked Allan who was most unpleasantly impressed by the man's manner and words.

"On account of them pesky Injuns living right along side of you. If you'd only took my advice and located the quarter they're squatted on, of cose they'd had to git, and then you wouldn't had no trouble. But seeing as you're 'lected to take this one ——"

"What harm will the Indians do us?" interrupted Allan, somewhat impatiently. "I don't see but what they are quiet and neighborly enough."

"That's it! That's just it!" answered the trader mysteriously. "Hit's a part of their treacherous naters to keep quiet, and lay low, and act neighborly till they sees their chance, then out comes their claws and first thing you knows you'm scratched. Oh, they'm treacherous, Injuns is. They'm all-fired treacherous! But maybe we can fix 'em so they won't do you no harm. Now come right along down home with me. I

see you've shot a right peart-looking tukkey, and ——"

"I didn't shoot it," explained Allan. "Someone left it here while we were still asleep."

"You don't say! Then my advice is to leave it alone. Some one of them Injuns has played you that trick, and if you accept of that tukkey he'll have its worth outen you a hundred times afore he lets up. Hit's jest a part of their treachery to place a white man under a obligation for some wuthless thing, and then beg or steal its value so many times over that he'd better have paid for it with diamonds in the fust place. Hain't lost nothing yet, have ye?" Here the speaker gazed inquiringly about him.

"No — that is — yes," hesitated Allan.

At the same moment Bessie exclaimed, "The canoe!"

"What?" cried Mr. Algrove. "You hain't lost that canoe? Well, ef that ain't the beatenest! Of cose, though hit's the very thing they'd go for fust. I took note that 'twarn't at the landing as I come along, and I spoke to my nigger about it at the time. 'Curious where they've left their canoe,' says I to him, and he says, 'Looks mighty curious, boss.' Them's the very words. Now, I'll bate a cookie that English Billy has took a fancy to that canoe, and — "

"Do you mean to say that you think he has stolen it?" interrupted Allan. He could not bear to have the suspicion he had already begun to entertain put into words, especially by such a man as this one seemed to be.

"Stolen? Oh, no! The Seminoles make a brag that they don't never steal nothing. Same time, I reckon they wouldn't be above exchanging a tukkey for a canoe, and thinking it a smart trick. But they'll find old man Algrove too wideawake for them yet. If Billy hes took it, 'tain't noways likely he'll dass to use it for awhile, or not until you've quit hunting for it. Now he don't keep more'n one dug-out at a time down here, but he's got two more that he hides up in the aidge of the 'glades.' He doesn't know that I'm onto his hiding place, but I am, and I'll bate — well I'll bate anything you like that if you'll come up there with me now, before the Injun has time to take it anywhere's else, we'll find your canoe."

"I never bet," answered Allan, "but I'll go with you, and if we find my canoe where you think it is, I shall certainly be suspicious of Indians in the future."

"Of course you'll have a right *to* be," replied Mr. Algrove cheerfully. "When you come to know 'em as well as I do, you'll be as anxious as I be to have 'em druv outen the country, and

white men settled in their place. Now if you don't mind rowing, we'll leave my nigger here to look out for the ladies till we come back. Then we'll pick all on 'em up, and go on down to the settlement."

So Allan and the trader set forth in search of the missing canoe, after promising to be back by noon at the latest, and Salem Sandig, who had been fast asleep in the bottom of the boat, was rudely awakened and sent to the camp to protect the ladies. This he prepared to do by seeking the shade of a convenient palmetto and speedily resuming his interrupted nap.

In the meantime, Allan and his companion worked their boat by means of oars and poles for several miles up the west fork of the Coochee. This river, with its crystal waters hurrying swiftly above beds of vividly colored grasses, strange rock formations or snowy sands, its queer animal forms, its dense, over-arching, tropical foliage, and the mystery of its outflow from the unknown everglades, would have proved of fascinating interest to the northern lad had he been alone, or with any other companion. As it was he became so weary of having his attention directed to favorable mill or factory sites, of listening to calculations concerning the amount of lumber that might be cut from the stately forest trees, of being instruc-

ted in the best methods for killing birds, or of converting millions of food fishes into commercial fertilizer and kindred topics, that he was thankful when they neared the end of their voyage, and Mr. Algrove warned him in a whisper to keep quiet.

"We'm mos' there now. The Injun's hiding-place is in them coco-plum bushes jest round that pint," he said.

Once around the point in question, the boat was forced slowly and cautiously through a narrow channel bordered by dense thickets. Finally it emerged on a pool of black, mirror-like water, from the farther side of which a dim trail entered the forest.

"Here we be," whispered the guide, "and here, ef I haint mightily mistaken, is where you'll find your canoe."

But Joel Algrove was mightily mistaken, and apparently greatly surprised as well; for, although several Indian dug-outs were fastened to bushes bordering the pool, there was no trace of a birch canoe to be seen. Allan wondered at the persistence of his companion's search for the missing craft in all likely and unlikely places, and at the unaccountable ill-humor with which he finally abandoned it, declaring that he couldn't understand it nohow. Disappointed as the former was

not to find his canoe, he was at the same time relieved to have one cause for suspicion against his friend Ul-we thus removed.

Two hours later the unsuccessful searchers had rejoined the ladies at the big cypress, and taken them to the Algrove place at the mouth of the river. Here, when the homesteaders were gathered in Mrs. Lawton's room, Bessie asked, in a low but excited tone:

"Did you see it, Allan?"

"What?"

"Why, the Hu-la-lah, of course!"

"Where?" asked both Mrs. Lawton and Allan in a breath.

"Under the front piazza of this very house," answered the girl. "I saw it so plainly as we passed, that I thought you must have, of course."

In another moment the Hu-la-lah's impetuous owner had rushed downstairs, and out of the front door to learn if this surprising statement could be true.

CHAPTER XI.

UL-WE GETS EVEN WITH THE TRADER.

When Joel Algrove discovered that the homestead he had intended should belong to his son was already located, and that by a family whom he had thought could easily be persuaded to settle on Indian land, and induced to take active measures for driving them from it, he was furious. A few minutes' reflection, however, convinced him that his wisest course would be to maintain the position of friendly adviser, instill into the minds of the Lawtons such a distrust of their Indian neighbors as should destroy all kindly feeling between them, and trust to future happenings to throw their newly acquired land into his possession. The scheme of stealing Allan's beloved canoe, placing it with those of the young Seminole, and afterwards leading its owner to the spot, seemed to him so good a one that he immediately proceeded to put it into execution. Of course Salem Sandig was bound to secrecy, and threatened with dire consequences if he should ever let drop a hint concerning the affair.

More than once did the trader chuckle to himself during that night's hard work of towing the canoe to its hiding place, as he reflected upon the probable outcome of his trick; while even the thick-headed negro began dimly to appreciate it and speculate as to the final result.

It was broad daylight, and the sun had just risen, ere the task was accomplished; for towing the canoe, in the dark, up those swift waters, was slow work, and the windings of the stream made the way a long one. Long as it was by water, the distance by land from Ul-we's camp to his hiding place of canoes was so short that, after leaving his gift at the Lawton hut, the Indian had covered it, and reached the pool of black water just in time to see the Algrove boat disappear from its opposite side. At the same moment his quick eye detected the bark canoe of his white friend, the dainty craft he so longed to possess, snugly moored between his own rude dug-outs. In an instant he realized the meaning of its presence, and that of those who had just left the place. A black cloud was being drawn between him and the white youth for whom he entertained so strong a regard.

Well; let it come! why should he care? Were not all the whites alike cruel and treacherous? This new friendship might at any time be swept

away, and if he let it go now, he would at least have this beautiful canoe in exchange. He could easily carry it off into the 'glades, and use it in waters to which no white man ever penetrated. Suddenly the memory of Mrs. Lawton's brave speech, when she refused to take his land, flashed into his mind. Was he not bound by it to respect the property and rights of her and hers as though they were of his own people?

Thus filled with conflicting thoughts, and all the while gazing longingly at the Hu-la-lah, the young Indian stood for a few moments motionless. Then a smile slowly lighted his face. A plan of action had presented itself, and he at once proceeded to carry it out by stepping lightly into the bark canoe, and paddling swiftly away.

On emerging from the narrow channel that led from the pool, he did not turn down stream as the Algrove boat had done; but, heading in the opposite direction, urged his light craft directly into the 'glades. It would have been evident to an ordinary observer that he had decided to exchange friendship for a canoe, and was making off with his share of the bargain.

For several miles he threaded the narrow and tortuous channels, that, filled with the dark green of bonnets and lily-pads, spread like veins through the brown grasses of the 'glades. At length he

came to a heavily wooded island, on which, hidden by a thick screen of timber, was located one of the principal villages of his people. Many dug-outs lay half concealed among the bushes of the shore; and, leaving Hu-la-lah with these, Ul-we disappeared in the underbrush. Half an hour later he again came in sight. Now he was accompanied by a group of young Indians of his own age, all of whom were talking at once and laughing immoderately as though at some huge joke. After the strange canoe, built by other Indians who dwelt in the far North, had been duly examined, wondered at, and admired by his friends, Ul-we entered it and paddled away. He was followed by two dug-outs containing the other Indians, and all were headed for that place on the edge of the 'glades whence the north fork of the Coochee took its plunge down the tumbling rapids that only ended at the big cypress.

Like glancing arrows the canoes darted down the quick waters; but at the stately tree towering above the smooth flood below the rapids they came to a halt. Here, while the others drifted, Ul-we stepped ashore and studying its imprints with that knowledge gained only by children of the forest, quickly learned that the Algrove boat had returned to that place, and had again departed up stream bearing its owner and Allan

Lawton. The signs also told him that the negro, as well as the ladies, had been left behind.

The riddle was so easy to read that within two minutes Ul-we had learned everything of importance connected with the trader's several visits. He even discovered that on his first visit, the white man had attempted to obliterate his own footprints as well as the darkness would permit, by throwing water over them; while leaving those of his barefooted companion clear and distinct. He also learned from such impressions as were partly in sunlight and partly in shade, that the boat had already been gone more than an hour on its second trip up the river, and that he had, therefore, no time to lose in carrying out his own plan. Nevertheless, the young Seminole devoted a few minutes to paying an undiscovered visit to the little camp he had helped establish the day before. Here he saw the negro peacefully sleeping outside the hut, and heard the voices of his friend's mother and sister from behind its thatched walls. All was evidently well with them, and there was no occasion for him to make his presence known.

Not long afterwards, several young Seminoles entered the trader's store at the mouth of the river, and were so impatient of any delay in being shown the goods they wished to examine, that the clerk in charge called Hiram Algrove from the

house to assist him. Venus Sandig and her mother were in the kitchen, but were too busily at work to take note of what was going on outside. Consequently no one saw Ul-we and one of his companions lift Allan Lawton's canoe carefully from the water, carry it from the landing to the house, gently deposit it under the front piazza, and then hasten away. As Ul-we did not enter the store, nor allow himself to be seen by any who belonged on the place, his presence there was unknown and unsuspected.

Hardly had the canoe been safely removed to its new hiding-place, when the customers who had demanded such active service from Hiram and the clerk left the store, without having made a purchase, and hastened to the landing. From here, with shouts of laughter they entered their dug-outs and departed down the coast.

In the store, they had left the counters piled with unrolled bolts of calico and flannel, unfolded blankets and a miscellaneous assortment of goods, none of which had seemed to suit them. It took Hiram and the grumbling clerk so long a time to restore these to their places, that ere the task was finished Mr. Algrove and the Lawtons arrived from up the river. A few minutes later Bessie's sharp eyes discovered the Hu-la-lah snugly hidden beneath the front piazza, as has been stated.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. ALGROVE'S PERPLEXITY.

WHEN Allan assured himself, by a glance, that the canoe beneath the Algrove piazza was, indeed, his own, the very one he had been led to suspect his friend Ul-we of stealing, he became furiously indignant. He was so angry that, for a few minutes, he required all the aid afforded by his mother's hand on his shoulder, and of her gentle, "Remember, Allan, that under all circumstances you are a gentleman," to enable him to regain his self-control.

"But, mother, think what a mean thing it was to do! Trying to break my friendship with Ul-we by making me believe that he had stolen the canoe, when the miserable old fraud had it stowed away here all the time. Oh, I despise him so, that I never want to speak to him, or even see him again! I must tell him what I think of him, though, and then we must get away from here, for it doesn't seem as if I could spend another night under the same roof with such a scoundrel."

"There, dear, that will do. I feel very much

as you do, but we mustn't allow ourselves to form a conclusion without listening calmly to what Mr. Algrove has to say on the subject. There are always two sides to a story, you know."

"But, mother, that canoe couldn't possibly have got here unless he brought it, or at least without his knowledge. I declare, though, it could too, and I believe I know now how it was done. He took that squint-eyed son of his up the river, and sent him back here with Hu-la-lah, while he remained to throw us off the track. And the stupid fellow didn't know any better than to hide it right here in plain sight. I've as good a mind to give him a thrashing as ever I had to eat."

"And thereby make an assured enemy out of a possible friend," said Mrs. Lawton. "Oh, no, my dear boy, such an act would be too unworthy of you. The thrashing of even an avowed and utterly unreasonable enemy is the very last resort of a manly man or boy, while to thrash one who is evidently weaker than yourself, and who, for all you know to the contrary, may entertain the most friendly feelings towards you, would be cowardly, to say the least."

"Of course it would!" cried the honest, young fellow, "and, as usual, I spoke without thinking, but what shall I do under the circumstances?"

"Hold to your faith in Ul-we, listen calmly to

Mr. Algrove's explanation of how the canoe came here, control your temper, consider the possible effect of every word before you speak, and never, for a moment, forget that a true gentleman is such in a wilderness, no less than in a city drawing-room. Here comes Mr. Algrove now."

With a bright nod of assent to show that he comprehended and would follow his mother's advice, Allan turned toward the approaching trader. "Well, Mr. Algrove!" he said, "I am much obliged to you for taking my canoe in out of the sun; but I don't exactly understand the joke of going way up into the 'glades under pretence of looking for her, when you must have known that she was here all the time."

"Whatever are you driving at?" asked the trader as he drew near. "I haint no more idee where your canoe is than you have. I only wish I had, and when I get hold of some of them pesky Injuns —"

Allan interrupted these remarks by stepping aside and pointing to the bow of the Hu-la-lah projecting from under the piazza.

For a moment the trader stood silent and open mouthed with amazement.

"Well, I swan!" he ejaculated at length. How, in the name er nation, did that canoe come here?"

"That's just what we want to know," replied Allan, "and we thought perhaps you would be willing to tell us."

"Me? Look ahere, young man, do you think I'd go rowing and poling up that pesky river to help you find what I knew was here all the time? No, sir, I may be a fool, but I ain't no such a blamed fool as that, and I'll swear an affidavy that I left that perticular canoe — "

"Where?" asked Allan quickly, as the other came to an abrupt pause.

"I was jest considering," he replied slowly, "which place it was we landed at yesterday, 'cause wherever that was is where I left that canoe when me and Hiram come down the river. I know now. 'Twas at the Injun's landing, and that's what made me think, this morning, when you said it was gone, that maybe English Billy had took it. I hain't certain now that he didn't, neither."

"But he surely wouldn't bring it here," returned Allen.

"He might. They'm jest mean enough to do a trick like that, if they thought it would cause you to suspicion me. Oh, Hi, come here a minute."

As Hiram, who was sauntering towards the house obeyed this summons, his father asked:

"Any Injuns been here this morning?"

"Yes, half a dozen or so."

"Was English Billy with 'em?"

"I didn't see him."

"Did any of 'em come up to the house?"

"No, they only come to the store."

"How'd this canoe get here, then?"

"Canoe! I'm sure I don't know. This is the first time I've set eyes onto it," replied Hiram, apparently gazing around a corner of the house in blank amazement. "Why it's Lawton's canoe, ain't it?"

"Of cose it is; and it 'pears almighty queer that such a thing could been put under our front piazza 'thout you knowing nothing about it, and you here all the time too. Hey, you, Wenus, who brung this canoe here?"

"Fo' de lan' sakes, Boss! Fustes time ebber I seen de cooner," declared the colored girl. With her mother she had come from the kitchen to learn the cause of all the commotion, and now they both stared at the canoe as though it were a rattlesnake.

"You, Salem! You know anything 'bout this canoe?"

"No, sah, I ain't know nuffin," answered the negro thus addressed. He tried to appear brave and unconcerned, but his frightened glances at the mysterious canoe were not lost upon his keen-

witted daughter, who determined to question "Pap" good when she got him alone.

So to Lawtons, Algroves, and Sandigs the goings and comings of that innocent birch were most unaccountable and mysterious. The incident served, however, to arouse the Lawtons' suspicions concerning the sincerity of Mr. Algrove's protestations of friendship, and to restore their confidence in Ul-we. It caused the Sandigs to believe more firmly than ever in the existence and powers of witches. As for Mr. Algrove, it warned that perplexed and chagrined individual, that he must redouble his efforts to regain the confidence of these homesteaders, if he proposed to make them useful in furthering his schemes for land-grabbing.

CHAPTER XIII.

YOUNG BEACH COMBERS.

So anxious was Joel Algrove to remove from the minds of the Lawtons any suspicions arising from finding the lost canoe on his premises, that he became most diligent in furthering their plans. Thus, by his aid, they were able to fill out and send off their application papers to the land office that very day. Having thus made good their claim to the quarter section marked by the big cypress, our homesteaders suddenly became very impatient to enter into possession of, and begin to improve their property. Even Mrs. Lawton, longing for a home of her own, began to think that, after all, her causes for fright in the little palmetto hut were not so great as she had imagined, and that she might be persuaded to spend a few more nights beneath its shelter.

Although they intended to build a house of logs, some sawed lumber was deemed so desirable that, before going up the river, Allan decided to visit the outer seabeach, on which, as he had been told, wrecked lumber could generally be picked

up. For this purpose he hired a boat from Mr. Algrove, and engaged Salem Sandig to accompany him. Just before they started, Hiram Algrove, who was an expert beach-comber, hesitatingly volunteered to go with them, and seemed much pleased when Allan promptly accepted his offer.

The young beach-combers, or "wrackers" as Mr. Algrove called them, did not expect to be gone more than two days; so, when nearly a week passed without a sign of them, Mrs. Lawton's anxiety became almost unendurable. Even Mr. Algrove was beginning to consider the advisability of going in search of the missing party, when, late at night of the sixth day, they returned. The household was awakened by their shouts, and the fond mother's heart leaped for joy as she recognized Allan's voice above the others. In another minute she and Bessie, in hastily donned wrappers, were welcoming the wanderer, who had bounded upstairs, too excited to wait until morning before relating his adventures.

"O mother! such luck, and such a trip as we have had!" he cried.

He was barefooted, and sunburned almost beyond recognition, while his clothing was torn and water-soaked.

"You look a regular tramp!" exclaimed Bessie,

gazing admiringly at her brother, "and as if you'd had a glorious time. I wish I had been with you."

"Don't you, though? It beat anything I ever dreamed of! We got out of provisions, and had to live on fish, and turtle, and conchs, and gophers. I tell you, that Salem is a dandy at making gopher soup, and as for fried conchs! Well, they are just about as fine eating as I want. We—"

"Did you find any lumber?" interrupted Mrs. Lawton.

"Did we? Well I should say so! We've got ten thousand feet if we have a stick. Boards, scantling, matched stuff, and sheathing, besides a few bunches of shingles, all in a raft at the mouth of the river. Hiram says he never saw so much stuff on the beach at one time. There must have been a big lumber wreck somewhere down the reef, and the whole deck load drifted up this way with the gulf stream. When it struck the northeast trades, blowing around the upper end of the Bahamas, it drove in on our beach and we got there just in time to receive it. There's lots more, but we couldn't handle any larger raft than we've got."

"I'm sorry for the poor men who got wrecked," remarked Mrs. Lawton.

"Yes, so am I, awfully sorry; but wasn't it the biggest kind of luck for us, though? There were

some other fellows out there, too, and we had to race with them for every stick. Whenever they got ahead of us they had to work for it, I can tell you! In the water up to our waists! I don't believe my clothes have been dry more than an hour at a time since we left here."

"O Allan! how could you?" expostulated his mother.

"It was only salt water, momsey, and you know that never hurts any one. Why, it's as good for a boy as it is for a fish. And we almost caught the biggest kind of a moray, a great eel that looks like a sea serpent, you know, and met lots of sharks. We went to the crocodile pond where there are genuine Egyptian crocodiles, the only ones in the United States, so Hiram says. We saw the most lovely corals and sea fans, red, purple, and yellow, and the greatest lot of sponges, and I can tell a sheep's-wool, that's the best kind, you know, from a logger-head, which isn't any good, every time. Oh, I've learned such a lot. Hiram is going to show me how to dig turtles' eggs as soon as they begin to lay, and then there'll be bears on the beach, too; he's seen 'em lots of times. This country is the very place for a boy to live in, I can tell you, and if father were only here, I, for one, should never want to leave it."

"But, dear, aren't you tired out, and hungry,

and don't you think we'd all better go to bed and leave the rest of your story until to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Lawton, smiling at the lad's enthusiasm.

"Hungry? Yes, I believe I could eat a whole bear. Tired? Not a bit, but I won't keep you two up any longer, only I must tell you of a scheme I thought out. What do you say to a houseboat, to live in while our regular house is being built? Hiram and I know just how to build it, and when we don't want to live in it, it will still be the most useful thing in the world for us to have. We can carry all our freight up the river in it, and bring down our tomatoes and pineapples, and now that we've got so much lumber it seems to me the very thing we need most. We can build it right here, you know, and begin to use it at once."

"What pineapples?" asked Mrs. Lawton.

"Why, the ones we are going to raise on the homestead."

"Oh, yes, I remember, you said they would be ready for shipping in about two years. Certainly we ought to have a boat at once to carry them to market."

"Now, mother, don't be disagreeable. You know what I mean well enough, and truly I don't see how we can do anything without a houseboat."

"They have striped awnings, don't they?" asked Bessie, who had read of English houseboats on the Thames and was inclined to be quizzical. "And they have silken sails, and gorgeous hangings of oriental stuffs, and barges, and ——"

"Of course they do, Queen Bess, and they are generally gold plated, and kept in glass cases for fear of dust from the water, and that's just the kind of a houseboat we'll begin to build to-morrow, if mother will only say the word."

"Go along, you absurdity!" laughed Mrs. Lawton as, with a loving good-night kiss, she pushed the boy gently from the room. "We will talk it over to-morrow."

Although neither Bessie, who had only the Thames style of houseboat in her mind, nor Mrs. Lawton, who disliked the idea of living in a floating house quite as much as she did that of the palmetto hut, thought favorably of Allan's plan, his enthusiasm overcame all their objections, and it was finally decided that the houseboat should be built.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE "SKIMMER OF THE SEAS."

So dilligently was work prosecuted on the house-boat, that in ten days' time it was finished. Hiram Algrove, whose ambition had never before been stimulated by the companionship of a live Northern boy, was almost as enthusiastic over it, and worked almost as hard at its building, as did Allan himself. As he knew infinitely more about boats, and was very handy in the use of tools, his assistance was of the greatest value. Even the trader manifested an interest in the novel craft, and, though he ridiculed it and called it a waste of good lumber, he did not disdain to work on it at odd hours, and to give many useful hints regarding its construction.

Although Mrs. Lawton regarded it with many misgivings, and failed to realize that it would ever be made a comfortable dwelling-place, she regarded the solidity of its construction with satisfaction, and, by the time the house part of it was built, began to find a real pleasure in arranging its interior.

As for Bessie, who had set her heart upon a

picturesque log cabin that she could over-run with vines and flowers, she would not admit that a houseboat could be of any real value to people in their situation. At the same time it was she who unwittingly gave it a name, by speaking ironically of it as a "skimmer of the seas." It became the *Skimmer* from that moment, and was never called anything else.

The *Skimmer* was a combination of rude though strongly built and water-tight scow, twenty feet long by ten broad, and an equally rude but weather-proof shanty twelve feet long by seven wide, with walls six feet high. The interior was divided into two rooms by a curtain of brown burlap. One of these rooms contained two bunks that, when not in use, could fold up against the wall, a tiny wash-stand, two camp stools, a trunk, and several shelves. In the other room, which was larger, were a table, four chairs, an oil stove, a small closet in which was stowed the roll of blankets that formed Allan's bed, and a variety of useful articles, all packed in the smallest compass. Each room had two windows that could be closed by wooden shutters, and a door opening on the little four-foot decks left at either end of the scow. These decks were shaded by burlap awnings. The eighteen-inch side decks, running the whole length of the shanty, were for the use of

"I think, madam, if you will look over the items you will find them all right," replied the trader blandly, "but, as I said, I am in no hurry for the money, your note payable in sixty, ninety, or even one hundred and twenty days, will do just as well, though, of course, I should have to charge interest."

Hardly hearing what he said, Mrs. Lawton ran her eye rapidly over the items of the bill, the total of which was nearly twice the sum of money still remaining in her purse. "Board at thirty dollars per week, two and one half weeks;" goods at exorbitant prices, "boat hire, personal services in attending to homestead matters, wages of Salem Sandig, services rendered by son Hiram," etc., etc.

"I see you have charged for your son's services," remarked Mrs. Lawton at length. "That item is somewhat of a surprise, for I had supposed from his conversation that his assisting Allan was purely a matter of friendship."

"Performed with the most friendly feeling, madam, with the most friendly feeling, I can assure you, but friendship is one thing and business is another. So long as Hi ain't of age, and I am obliged to support him, I have to get what I can out of him in the way of work or its value. Maybe when he gets to be his own boss, Hi'll

be able to afford the luxury of friendships that cost money. I hain't never found 'em pay, though, and I don't reckin' he'll fool much with 'em, neither. He's bound to be a chip of the old block, my boy Hi is."

Hiram Algrove heard every word of this conversation, and, though he seemed to be looking across the river and remained silent, his face was as red as fire. He had volunteered to help get the *Skimmer* up the river, and Allan had gladly accepted the offer, supposing it to be made in a spirit of friendship, such as would have impelled him to offer his services under similar circumstances. Now he, too, overheard the conversation that changed Hiram's position from that of one lending friendly assistance to that of a laborer who is hired. Although Allan was too much of a gentleman to allow this to make any difference in his treatment of the lad who stood at the forward end of the boat, nervously handling his push pole, the tone in which he shouted, "Look alive, Hiram! Shove her bow out and let's be off," so plainly, though unintentionally, indicated his change of feeling, that the face of the cross-eyed youth burned more hotly than ever as he silently obeyed the order.

Mrs. Lawton had said, "Very well, Mr. Algrove, I will settle this bill as you suggest, and,

if you will authorize your son to sign a receipt, will send a promisory note for the full amount, with interest, back by him."

To this the trader agreed, and his final instructions were shouted to Hiram in the hearing of several by-standers, as the boat drifted slowly out into the stream.

While going up the river there was no chance for conversation between Allan and Hiram, as they were on opposite sides of the cabin, and too busily employed to speak, even had they been within sight of each other.

On arriving at the big cypress, the Lawtons were more than surprised to find a broad trail cut and cleared from the river to the hut, a score of young banana plants set out in the moist, rich soil, near the water, and a fine bed of sweet potatoes made in the open glade back of the knoll.

"I didn't know you had been here and at work," said Hiram, speaking almost for the first time since they started up the river.

"I haven't," answered Allan; "but whoever has done all this, I'm certainly much obliged to him. I only hope he won't expect to be paid for his labor, though, for after settling with your father, I don't believe we shall have much money left."

Allan had not meant to say anything so cruel

as this, and was sorry the moment the words were out of his mouth; but Hiram, turning quickly away and starting toward the hut with a heavy load of goods, did not give him a chance to recall them.

Before the cross-eyed youth left Big Cypress that evening, he had signed his father's name to a receipt in full, for the bill, and received a note in which Mrs. Lawton promised to pay Joel Algrove one hundred and fifty-two dollars, with interest at one per cent. per month, four months from date.

As he was not invited to pass the night on the homestead, which would have been the case had a plan made between him and Allan the day before been carried out, and as there was no other craft in which he could go home, Hiram was forced to borrow the Hu-la-lah. The two lads bade each other good-night rather constrainedly, and Allan did not notice the hand hesitatingly proffered for the friendly grasp that always accompanies the meetings and partings of acquaintances in the South. Not being accustomed to this general handskaking, the Northern lad was not looking for the motion, and had not seen it ere the hand was quickly withdrawn, and its owner turned abruptly away.

Allan watched him out of sight, and then with a sigh of disappointment and perplexity, turned

and walked toward the palmetto hut that held down their claim to the big cypress homestead. Here, to avoid the clouds of gnats that always swarm above those Southern rivers at sunset, but disappear completely an hour or so later, the Lawtons had decided to have their supper. Thus we are brought to the situation with which, in the first chapter, our readers were introduced to these homesteaders of the everglades.

CHAPTER XV.

HIRAM RECEIVES AN OFFER.

As Hiram Algrove left the little houseboat, in the building of which he had been so interested, he was more unhappy than ever before in his life. Nor had he ever felt so utterly humiliated. Allan Lawton had refused to shake hands with him. He had been so proud of this friendship and striven so hard to deserve it. Now it was so utterly lost that even the common courtesy of an acquaintance was denied him. Nor was it through any fault of his that this had happened. He had been as shocked and amazed as Allan himself to learn that the services he had rendered so gladly had been charged for in his father's bill. As he remembered how he had almost insisted on helping Allan, and had forced his company on him, he could have cried aloud with shame and vexation.

Hiram had always been a shy lad, and had been made to realize ever since he could remember, that on account of his eyes he was an object of ridicule that often amounted to positive aversion.

The few boys whom he knew always called him "squint-eye" or "squinty," while even his own father invariably referred to his misfortune as though it were a disgrace. His only friend had been his mother, a gentle, overworked woman, who had died three years before, leaving her only child broken-hearted and alone. From her he had learned all that he knew of right and wrong, and of such things as love, honesty, and duty. After she left him, and until the coming of the Lawtons, the boy lived by himself. He performed mechanically and without ambition the tasks set him by his unsympathizing father, and longed for the time when he should be free to leave his home, and go so far away that he should never hear from it again.

The coming of the Lawtons was a revelation that filled him with new hopes and ambitions. From the very first they had treated him with courtesy and consideration, and never, by word or look, had they betrayed a consciousness of his unfortunate appearance. While Mrs. Lawton won his love by her gentleness and kindly interest in his affairs, and while he regarded Bessie with awe and admiration, his feeling towards Allan was that of an intense longing for his friendship. For this he had striven with all his might; and now, just as he imagined that his efforts were being

crowned with success, it was snatched from him. By his own father, too! And those for whose good opinion he was most anxious imagined that he had known all the time of that detestable bill! A dozen times during that day he had tried to find words to explain his true position to them, but had not been able. Now they had discharged him as they would any other servant who was no longer needed.

Mrs. Lawton's promissory note seemed to burn inside of his flannel shirt, where he had thrust it for safe keeping, like a coal of fire. How he wished he dared destroy it, or could place it beyond his father's reach until he could in some way earn money enough to pay it himself. What a grand idea that was! and what a proof of his friendship it would be if he could only take up that note, and at the end of four months hand it, paid and cancelled, to Mrs. Lawton! Why hadn't he thought of that plan before? How could he earn so much money, though? He had never dreamed of possessing such a sum. He might of course go sponging, turtling, or wrecking; but all of these were uncertain, and at any one of them he might work for the whole four months without earning a cent. Would his father let him go, even if a chance offered? He was afraid not. Still the possible result of such an effort was worth trying

for, and he would try for it by every means in his power.

During this period of unhappy reflection, Hiram had allowed his canoe to drift with the current. Now inspired by a new ambition, and roused into activity by having a definite purpose to work for, he seized a paddle and sent the light craft spinning down stream with such vigorous strokes that in less than half an hour he gained the mouth of the river. A small schooner lay at his father's wharf, and from it a voice hailed him, as he made the canoe fast.

"Hello, Hi! That you?"

"Yes. That you, Cap'n Bagg? What do you want?"

"I've caught one at last, and want you to help me get him down to Key West. Cal's drove a grains into his foot, and is laid up so's he can't go."

"My! You don't say you've really got one! Where is he?"

"In the well. I towed him across the bay, and we've only jest got him histed in. He's a good one, I tell yer, and I reckin he must weigh all of twelve hundred. Come aboard and see him."

The schooner was a smack, or one having a large well built into her hold. In its bottom were a number of augur holes, through which the sea water flowed freely in and out.

Hiram needed no second invitation to scramble aboard the schooner; and, in another minute, he was gazing into the well and examining, by lantern-light, a fine specimen of the rarest animal to be found within the limits of the United States. It was a manatee or sea cow, ten feet long, and as big round as a cask. It had a broad, flat tail, of wonderful strength and so splendidly adapted to propelling it through the water, that, by using it alone, the manatee is said to be able to travel at the rate of ninety miles per hour. The animal was shaped much like a seal, and had two powerful flippers resembling those of a turtle, growing from its fore shoulders. Its head was small, its nostrils were on top of its nose and about once a minute it lifted them to the surface for a breath of air.

It was covered with elephant-colored hide of immense thickness, in which a few coarse hairs were scattered at wide intervals.

Powerful as the manatee is it is absolutely harmless, and will not even attempt to defend itself when attacked. It is a warm-blooded animal, feeds entirely on marine grasses and succulent roots, but never leaves the water. It is now nearly extinct in this country, being only found in the extreme southeastern part of Florida, where it is much hunted for its flesh, which is highly esteemed by those who have the opportunity of

eating it. The animal is also in great demand for museums and aquariums.

The present specimen had been captured by Captain Bagg, whose usual business was fishing for the Havana market, to fill an order for a New York museum, and now he was anxious to get it off his hands as quickly as possible.

"I'll give you ten dollars for the trip," he said.

"Of course, I'd like to go," answered Hiram, "and I will in a minute if father'll let me."

"Oh, that's all right! He's gone off up the bay on some business, but I spoke to him about it, and he said he didn't care where you went."

"That settles it, then," replied the boy, thinking bitterly that no one now cared where he went, or what became of him. "How soon do you want to start?"

"Soon as you can be ready."

"I can't be ready under an hour, for I must take that canoe up the river first, I only borrowed her to come down in."

"All right. Hurry up."

Running up to the house the boy very slowly and awkwardly wrote two notes, one of which, addressed to his father, read as follows: —

"*Dad:*

"Long as you don't care ware I go, I'm going.

I sined a receet for Miss Lawton's bill, an took a four month note. Shall carry it with me for feer of its gittin lost if I lef it.

"Yours, with respecs,

"HIRAM."

The second letter was directed to "Mr. Allan Lawton, Esq., Big Cypress Homestead," and contained the following: —

"*Dear Mr. Allan:*

"I've brought back the canoo. I shan't trouble you no more for I'm going off with a manertee. P'raps I'll find some friends what don't think I'd take pay for frienship. Don't worry bout payin the note. Wate till I come back. With best respecs for your ma and Miss Bessy, I am, onestly your friend,

HIRAM ALGROVE."

CHAPTER XVI.

"LORD ALFRED" THE MANATEE.

LEAVING the first of his two letters where his father would be certain to see it, and thrusting the other into his pocket, Hiram made up a small bundle of clothing and carried it aboard the smack. Then jumping into a skiff, he again started up the river, towing Hu-la-lah behind him. When he reached the big cypress, all was dark and quiet on the little houseboat that held those with whom the lonely lad so longed to claim friendship. Drawing the canoe noiselessly up on the bank, and carefully placing his letter in it under the paddle, Hiram re-entered his skiff and drifted away down the dark stream. As he did so he whispered:

"Good-by, Allan; good-by, Mrs. Lawton and Miss Bessie. Maybe when I come again I'll have enough money to buy back your friendship."

Not long afterwards, Captain Bagg's smack was slipping noiselessly from the mouth of the river before a gentle night air, and Hiram Algrove was leaving his home for the first time in his life. It was as sad a home-leaving as a boy could have,

for there was not a soul to bid him farewell, utter a regret over his departure, or express a wish for his return.

So faithfully did the cross-eyed lad perform the duties of manatee keeper, that, upon their arrival at Key West, Captain Bagg said to him:

"Look here, Hi, how would you like to go to New York?"

"I don't know," answered Hiram hesitatingly, dismayed at the mere thought of taking such a journey.

"It's like this," continued the other. "I'm promised five hundred dollars over and above all expenses if I deliver that critter alive and safe in New York; but if he dies before reaching there, I'm only to have my expenses; of course, I was calculating to go on with him myself, but after all, its only a speculation and a risky one at that, anyhow. Besides, I've got a lot of things to look after here that are more important. Now I don't see why you shouldn't go on to New York and look out for 'Lord Alfred,' as you call him, as well as I could. So I'll make you an offer. You take my place, and do your level best to get the critter to New York alive. If you succeed you may take a hundred dollars for yourself out of the five hundred the museum man will pay you on my order. If the manatee dies on the way, you won't

get nothing but your expenses there and back; but you'll have the trip, and see New York, which would be pay enough for most boys, even without the chance of making anything more. What do you say?"

One hundred dollars! How large the sum seemed to this boy, who had never owned more than one dollar at a time in his life. Under other circumstances Hiram would have jumped at the chance to make so much money so easily, but now, even it was not enough to satisfy his self-assumed obligation.

"Call it one hundred and fifty, and I'll go," he said after a moment's reflection.

"Can't do it," answered Captain Bagg. "That is," he added, "unless you'll travel steerage. My contract calls for first class passage both ways; but if you'll go steerage the difference will be just about fifty dollars, and you may have it in addition to the hundred."

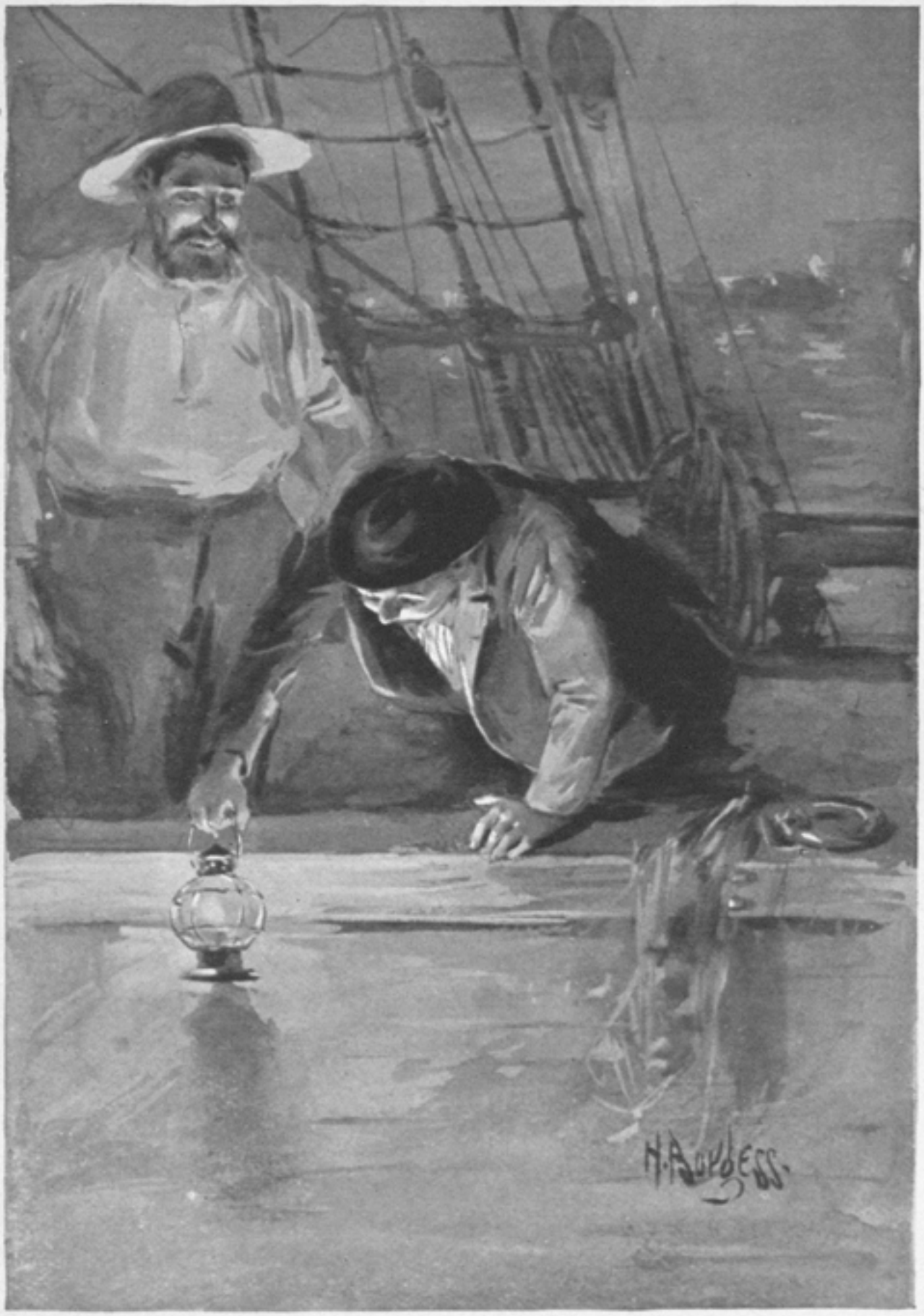
"I'll do it," answered Hiram promptly.

Thus it was settled, and a few hours later "Lord Alfred" was installed in a big tank on the lower deck of a great New York steamship that was ploughing her stately way out of Key West harbor. Beside the tank, and gazing wistfully through an open port, stood the animal's cross-eyed attendant, as lonely and homesick a lad as

ever set forth into the great world. He was, however, sustained by the hope of proving that his friendship was of as honorable a character as that of Allan Lawton, and as untainted with mercenary considerations. Thinking constantly of this enabled him to perform his duties faithfully during that tedious voyage, and submit with cheerfulness to the many trials of a steerage passage.

Before the voyage was ended he became really attached to the big and uncouth but gentle and tractable animal, so strong and well able to care for itself when at home, but now so absolutely dependent upon him for everything. It was the one connecting link between the lonely boy and his far-away Southern home, that he now realized was very dear to him, after all. So the manatee lacked for nothing that Hiram's assiduous care could supply. Each day the water in its tank was changed, and at least once in every hour of both night and day did the young attendant test the temperature of this water, which had to be maintained at about sixty degrees, and could be regulated by means of a steam coil. As for food, never was a manatee more bountifully supplied with cabbage leaves, lettuce, celery, beet and carrot tops, and whatever else Hiram could procure that he fancied his pet would eat.

At length the ship reached the great, roaring



HIRAM INSPECTS THE MANATEE.

city, in the presence of which this lonely lad from the far-away everglades felt as utterly lost and as helpless as "Lord Alfred" himself. Infinitely more so, in fact, for, thanks to his unremitting care, the manatee had arrived in good health, and, having resigned himself to confinement, was never more free from trouble or anxiety in his life.

From the moment Hiram obtained a near view of the swarming city streets, he resolved not to tempt fate by setting foot in them. Instead of doing anything so foolish, he proposed to remain safely where he was until the ship should be again ready to depart for the South. He had been told that a man named Glure, proprietor of the museum to which "Lord Alfred" was consigned, would meet him upon arrival. Knowing nothing of the ways of the world, he supposed that this man would not only relieve him of the care of the manatee, but would hand him five hundred dollars, together with a return ticket to Key West, then and there. Never were expectations more sadly dispelled.

A dark-featured, flashily dressed man, who proved to be Mr. Glure, did board the ship as soon as she entered her dock, and expressed great satisfaction at finding the manatee alive and in good condition.

"We'll take him ashore this evening," he said

to Hiram, "and in the meantime you may come with me up to the museum, and see what you think of the quarters we are preparing for him."

"Thank you, sir, but I guess I won't go ashore," answered the lad, "and if it's all the same to you, you can pay me the money right here." So saying he produced the order given him by Captain Bagg and offered it for inspection.

Without even glancing at the paper the man replied, "Not go ashore! Oh, yes, you will; and, what's more, you'll stay ashore as long as I need you, or not one cent of money will you get from me. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, young feller."

CHAPTER XVII.

ALLAN'S PLAN, AND BESSIE'S.

ALTHOUGH the Lawtons were indignant at the exhorbitant charges for personal services contained in Mr. Algrove's bill, they thought it best to pay them rather than have an open rupture with one upon whom they were, in a measure, dependent. As Mrs. Lawton said, the incident taught them that in any business transaction it is of the first importance to have a full and clear understanding beforehand. So they must regard this as a valuable though expensive bit of experience. She was willing to give a note in payment of the bill, because this relieved her of a present obligation, and because Allan was so certain that, ere it fell due, they would have made much more than it called for by the sale of the tomatoes he intended to raise and ship to New York.

"It's a sure thing, mother," he explained over and over again. "You see, all through the early spring, tomatoes are in such demand up North that they'll bring all the way from one dollar and a half to three dollars a crate. Suppose we take the lowest figure and call it a dollar and a half.

The freight from here to Key West is ten cents per crate, and from there to New York, forty more, or fifty cents in all, which leaves one dollar per crate, net, for us.

Allan was very fond of his intimacy with the words, "net" and "gross," the meaning of which as used in connection with profits he had only lately understood.

"One dollar per crate *net*," he repeated, "and we can surely raise five hundred crates to the acre. They do that and better, in places where the soil isn't nearly so good as ours. Still we'll call it five hundred, and if we put in two acres, which, I suppose, is as much as I can handle at the start off, there is one thousand dollars of clear money. Knock off one hundred and fifty for Algrove's note, and three hundred and fifty more, which is a liberal allowance for labor, crates, and other expenses, and you still have five hundred left. That, alone, would see us through the year even if we didn't make another cent, but we will, for I've lots of plans on hand. One of them is starch. If Indians can make money out of coontie starch, I don't see why white men, with a better knowledge of business, shouldn't. Anyhow, I mean to ask Ul-we to go into partnership with me in the starch business, and try it, just as soon as we get the tomato crop off our hands.

"But suppose," said practical Bess, "that for some reason, rains, or drought, or locusts, or something else, your tomato crop should prove a failure."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Allan. "You might as well suppose all sorts of absurd things. To begin with, it doesn't rain in this country in the winter, that is, not enough to do any harm. As for drought, which is much more to be feared, I had thought of some sort of a windmill pump, until I saw Ul-we's irrigating canal running from the head of the rapids. Now I am going to ask him to let me extend it to this place. Locusts are what they have out in Kansas, not in Florida. As for the something elses, we must take our chances of them. All I know is, that plenty of people do make their living, year in and year out, from tomatoes alone, and if others can do it, why we can, that's all."

"But what part am I to take in all this money-making?" demanded the girl, who had no love for either dependence or idleness. "Am I to plough, or hoe, or act as a scare-crow, or what?"

"What, I guess," laughed Allan. "You certainly can't do any one of those other things. We haven't quite come to working girls in the fields in this country yet. You'll be doing your share by helping mother look after the house, I mean

the boat. Oh, pshaw! I mean the houseboat, and the hut, and learning to cook, and all sorts of things."

This conversation took place on board the *Skimmer* to which the homesteaders had returned to spend that first night, and soon afterwards they all went to bed, or "turned in" as Allan said.

For an hour or more, Bessie lay wideawake in her narrow berth, thinking. She could not be an idler in this struggle for a home. She could not be dependent upon her brother's labors; but what could she do towards earning money? Plan after plan was thought of and rejected until she almost despaired of finding one that was feasible.

Suddenly it came to her. In her excitement she sat up and almost exclaimed aloud. "The ologies, the dear old ologies! What is the use of their acquaintance if they can't help me out of a fix? There are zoölogy, conchology, ornithology, entomology, oölogy, erpetology, mineralogy, and the others, besides their cousins, botany and photography. I at least know most of them by sight, and I believe this is one of the very places where they can be made most useful. Mother was right, as she always is, and education is a valuable possession, no matter where you are. I only wish I had more of it."

The next morning, Allan, who was the first one out, discovered Ul-we in the act of leaving one of his many presents where it would be certain to attract attention. This time it was a half dozen of quail that he had snared. In reply to Allan's thanks for his many acts of kindness to them, the young Seminole answered:

"You are my friend, the same like my own people."

"Yes, but the people of one's own race are not always his friends," replied Allan, in whose mind the events of the preceding day were still fresh. "Hello! There's my canoe. I wonder when Hiram brought her back?"

Stepping to where the Hu-la-lah lay, he quickly discovered Hiram's letter, the contents of which puzzled him greatly. Then Ul-we told him of the mean trick the trader had attempted to play on him with that same canoe, and how he had turned the tables.

"Then Hiram didn't know anything about it, after all," said Allan reflectively.

"Hiram, no. I didn't see Hiram, he didn't see me."

This, taken in connection with the message he had just read, made the young homesteader think that perhaps he had been too hasty in his condemnation of the cross-eyed lad who had been his

daily companion and co-worker during the past two weeks.

When he stated this at the breakfast table, his mother thought so too, while Bessie said:

"I believe in him in spite of his eyes, and I'm going to tell him so the very next time I see him. What can he mean, though, by going off with a 'manertee'?"

As none of them knew, this question had to remain unanswered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN "'OLOGY SCHEME."

UL-WE shared that first houseboat breakfast with his friends on terms of perfect equality, and, when it was finished, he and Allan, carrying a spade and a pick, went off to locate a tomato field, and determine the feasibility of continuing the irrigating ditch to it.

Bessie, who wished to be alone for a time in order to think out the details of her new scheme, followed them as far as the palmetto hut. While seated in the cool semi-twilight of its interior, busily jotting down some memoranda, she was startled by a sound of low voices. Looking out she saw, standing before the hut and gazing irresolutely at it, Halissee, the Seminole girl, and her brother, the little Ko-wik-a.

As Bessie appeared, the former timidly held out to her a small bunch of flowers, while Ko-wik-a tumbled at her feet one of his namesakes, a gopher or land turtle, which many persons consider as good to eat as terrapin. As the animal lay motionless, having withdrawn head, feet, and tail,

within his shell, so that he was apparently an inanimate ball, the white girl took no notice of him. In fact, she was too fully occupied in studying the dainty flowers held in her hand, to pay attention to anything else just then.

"Why, they are artificial!" she exclaimed. "Did you make them Halissee? What are they made off?"

"Un-cah. Me make," answered the Indian girl, smiling proudly at the other's evident appreciation of her handiwork.

"Well, they are the most beautiful things I ever saw! and I do believe they are all made of tiny shells and fish scales. Here is a pink and white butterfly, too, looking so real that I thought he must be. Halissee, you are a regular genius, and I want you for a partner in my scheme. Let's go and tell mother all about it."

Thus saying, the originator of the 'ology scheme seized the hand of the bewildered Indian girl and hurried her away in the direction of the houseboat. Little Ko-wik-a, first stopping to recapture his unappreciated offering, which, finding itself unnoticed, had begun to crawl away, hastened after them.

Bursting breathlessly into the houseboat, Bessie cried, "Here is Halissee, mother, and she can do the most beautiful things you ever saw in

shells and scales! It's just the kind of work to help on my 'ology scheme, and I want you to spare just as much money as ever you can for the advertisement. Advertising is the life of trade, you know, and we can sell anything if we only advertise it enough!"

"Elizabeth! daughter! What are you talking about? Have you gone crazy, child?" asked Mrs. Lawton, regarding the excited girl with an anxious expression.

"Of course not, momsey, dear, and I forgot I hadn't told you all about my scheme; but it's like this. You see, everybody nowadays collects something or other, and all these collectors are willing to pay good prices for rare curios in their especial lines. Some take to stamps, coins, or autographs; some to birds, or eggs, and some to butterflies, or shells, or flowers, and all sorts of natural things that are beautiful or rare. Don't you remember the lovely album of algae that Nantucket girl made, and sold for such a lot of money the summer we were there? And don't you remember how good she was about showing me how to mount them? You know I've been collecting them whenever I've had a chance ever since, and I got a lot of beauties on the reef as we came here."

"Well, that's only one thing; for this whole country is full of and running over with just

the crew, who would walk along them while propelling the clumsy-looking craft with long push poles.

When the *Skimmer* was finally completed and ready for her voyage up the river, every available inch of space was filled with tools, household goods, and provisions, while the Hu-la-lah, towing behind, was loaded to her gunwales. From a staff nailed to the forward end of the cabin a little American flag fluttered bravely in the brisk breeze that blew directly up stream.

Only one unpleasant incident marked the setting forth of the homesteaders. Mrs. Lawton asked Mr. Algrove for his bill against them to date, and though the trader tried to persuade her to let it run awhile longer, declaring that he did not need the money at present, she insisted on having it. It was therefore made out, and handed to her just as she was stepping aboard the waiting craft. A glance at its total amount caused the poor woman to turn pale and utter a little gasping exclamation.

"One hundred and fifty-two dollars! Are you sure, Mr. Algrove, that there is not some mistake?" She had expected to be charged about fifty dollars for board and what few things they had procured at the store. That the bill could amount to three times that sum seemed incredible.

such curios as collectors want, and my scheme is to become a collector's agent for tropical Florida. I'm going to have Halissee for a partner, and after a while perhaps we'll get Allan and Ul-we to help us with the snakes, and alligators, and ——"

"Mercy!" screamed Mrs. Lawton, springing to her feet with a horrified expression, regardless of the workbasket that her sudden movement overturned. The next moment she was perched on a chair with her skirts gathered closely about her ankles, and was charging the girls as they valued their lives to do the same thing.

"Why, mother! What is the matter? What is it?"

"Oh, I don't know!" answered the frightened woman almost hysterically; "but just as you mentioned snakes and alligators, I felt something crawl between my feet and — there it is now! Kill it quick! Put it out! Oh what a dreadful-looking creature!"

As she pointed to the floor, little Ko-wik-a, who had been standing quietly, unobserved, behind the girls, dove under the chair and emerged with the innocent cause of all this fright tightly clasped in his chubby arms.

"Why, mother! It's only Ko-wik-a's gopher that he brought as a present. They are said to be very good to eat."

"Eat that creature?" cried Mrs. Lawton indignantly, "I hope we haven't come to that yet. I would as soon eat an alligator."

Not until Ko-wik-a had taken his restless and unwelcome gift outside would Mrs. Lawton descend from her place of refuge, and resume the consideration of her daughter's scheme.

"Well, where was I?" began Bessie when quiet was at length restored. "Oh, yes, at snakes and alligators. Of course we'd have to get the boys to help us collect such things. But I don't want them to know a word about it until the time comes. I want to get the scheme well started all by myself. But we must advertise it, momsey, and that's what I want a little money for. I have written out a form of advertisement that I would like to place in some first-class Northern paper. Now listen and see what you think of this:

"TO COLLECTORS AND MUSEUMS."

Rare Curios from the Everglades and Coral Reefs of Tropical Florida.

Algae (mounted); Alligators, skins, teeth, and eggs; Birds and eggs; Butterflies; Crocodiles, skins, skulls, and eggs; Coontie, plants and seeds; Corals; Conchs; Deer horns and skins; Everglade flowers and grasses; Ferns; Fish scale and shell flowers, insects, and jewelry; Gulf Stream

feathers, fans, and fishes; Heron and ibis plumes; Moonflower and mangrove seeds, roots, and leaves; Micromocs; Moses; Manatee bones (very rare and as fine as ivory); Moccasins (water or to wear); Nautilus shells (chambered); Orchids; Pelican pouches; Palms (small for potting); Photographs of Seminole Indians and tropical scenery; Resurrection ferns for Easter cards; Rattlesnake skins; Sea Beans (in pod); Sisal hemp leaves; Sponges (rare forms); Scorpions (in alcohol); Seminole costumes, weapons, and utensils; Sharks' teeth, jaws, and skins; Tarpon scales; Turtle shells and eggs; walking sticks of guava and other rare woods; etc., etc., can be procured at reasonable rates, and in any quantities, from *Collector*, *Coochee P. O.*, *Florida*."

"There, momsey! What do you think of that for an 'ology scheme? Don't say 'Nonsense,' or that it can't be carried out, for I know it can, if the boys will only help us. There is more money in it, too, than there is in all the tomatoes and pineapples Allan can raise. The great beauty of it is that my crop won't have to be planted, or weeded, or watered, but is all ready to be gathered this very minute."

"Especially the rattlesnakes," said Mrs. Lawton, who could not help smiling at her daughter's enthusiasm.

"Yes, especially the rattlesnakes. You may laugh, but you will find that rattlesnake skins are in great demand for belts, bags, slippers, or as trophies, and I have no doubt but that Ul-we could gather a rattlesnake as easily as I could an air-plant ; couldn't he, Halissee?"

"Un-cah," replied the Indian girl with a smile that showed her pretty dimples and milk-white teeth, "Ul-we big, brave, strong, shoot good, un-cah." She was very proud of her tall, handsome brother, was this Seminole maiden, and never missed an opportunity for sounding his praises.

Although Mrs. Lawton was so timid as to be afraid of snakes and all sorts of crawling things, she was possessed of a shrewd common sense which told her that the unique scheme proposed by her daughter was, at least, worth a trial, and this she said without hesitation.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER FOUR MONTHS.

In four months' time much may be accomplished, in any direction, by industry and perseverance; and, at the end of four months, after the Lawtons filed their claim to the big cypress homestead, so much had been done to the place that it was hardly recognizable by those who had not kept track of its changes. The dense growth of mangroves had been cleared away along a wide space of river front, and an acre of the open land behind the knoll had been turned up, and set out with thousands of tomato plants, raised in boxes from selected seed. The irrigating ditch had been continued from Ul-we's place to this field, and, though the season was one of unusual drought, the young plants had been so plentifully supplied with water through it that their equals for rank luxuriance were not to be seen in that part of the country. Hundreds of young trees, guavas, limes, lemons, oranges, and cocoanuts, most of them procured from Ul-we, or his Indian friends, had been set out, and thanks to unlimited water were doing

finely. In all this work the young Seminole had proved himself Allan's faithful friend, and but for his aid much of it could not have been accomplished.

During this period of almost daily intimacy Allan often talked earnestly with his companion concerning the time when all of that country would be occupied by white settlers, and the Indians would be driven out.

"If you could only homestead your land, Ul-we," he said, on one of these occasions.

"If I could, I would not," the other answered, with a fierce light leaping into his dark eyes. "I am Seminole! With my own people I will stand or fall! Besides I have not the years to make me old enough."

"But it might be taken in your mother's name, the same as this one is in mine," Allan urged.

For a moment the young Indian looked as though about to break forth in a passionate harangue; but restraining himself, he laid a hand gently on his friend's shoulder, and said: "S'pose many black mans come here some day, and kill the white mans, till only little few left? If they kill your mother, kill your sister, burn your house, pull up your field, and laugh and say, 'You ugly dog! go live like dog!' what you do? Eh? You say, 'Good, nice, black man, give me one little

piece of my own land, then I be black man too, and do same as him?' No, Allan; always you would be white man same like you born. So my mother always will be Seminole, same like she was born."

"If the land could only be bought," reflected Allan, half aloud.

"Buy for money my own land! My father's land!" cried Ul-we, so bitterly that Allan was startled by his tone. "Buy from who? Those who have stole it? Then bimeby, when Indian get little more money, they steal it some more, and say, 'Buy again.' So they do till Indian money all gone, then they say, 'Get out! Move some other place!'"

"Oh, no!" replied Allan eagerly. "It is not so bad as that. If you could once buy your land it would be yours always, and no man could touch it."

"So you have been taught. So you must believe," answered the Indian. "Ul-we has been taught other way, and so must believe other way." With these words he abruptly ended the conversation by turning away and disappearing in the forest, nor did Allan see him again for several days.

During the time that Allan worked so hard over his fields and ditches, Bessie Lawton devoted

an equal energy to what she was pleased to term her "'ology scheme." Although Halissee, who was her devoted admirer and imitator, was slow to comprehend its purpose, she was heartily interested in it from the very first. With her intimate knowledge of the surrounding country and its resources, and with her deft fingers, the Indian girl proved so valuable an assistant that without her aid it was evident the scheme would have resulted in failure.

On the first day Halissee and little Ko-wik-a had wonderingly helped Bessie gather a few choice orchids, air-plants, palms, and resurrection ferns. The last-named were the little tree ferns that wither to brown, dead-looking stalks in dry weather, and unfold into a vigorous life of vivid green with the first shower. A few of these apparently dead leaves, each stitched to a bit of card, on which were written directions for its reviving, and a few cards of pressed everglade grasses, were sent by mail to a well-known manufacturer of Christmas and Easter cards. To an exchange for woman's work was forwarded another package of cards, on which were mounted Bessie's choicest specimens of reef algae; while to a prominent nurseryman went a box containing orchids, air-plants, and a tiny palm.

With each of these packages Bessie sent a note

explaining her undertaking and asking for patronage. She also mailed her advertisement to a leading New York weekly, notified the Coochee post-master that she expected some of her mail matter to be addressed, "Collector," and having thus given her scheme a start, she awaited results with what patience she could command.

During this period of anxious waiting, Bessie devoted all her leisure time to learning from Halissee the secrets of her shell and scale work, and to teaching the quick-witted Indian girl how to mount everglade flowers and grasses, as well as how to float algae and arrange their delicate filaments. In this congenial work the latter acquired marvellous dexterity, and soon began to invent combinations of such beauty as to far excel her instructor's efforts in the same line. Not only this, but Halissee knew how to make a colorless glue that dampness would not affect, and which was just the thing for the mounting of grasses and ferns.

"It is wonderful! simply wonderful!" exclaimed Bessie one day, as she examined her pupil's latest creation. "If these don't bring about a revolution in this sort of thing, then I'm vastly mistaken. Why, Halissee, you will be the founder of a school, and a famous character, first thing we know."

At which the Seminole maiden, not understanding in the least what was meant, and only realizing that her efforts were proving satisfactory to her adored instructor, was greatly pleased and answered: —

"Un-cah. You like um, me like um plenty."

As the mails were brought to that out-of-the-way corner of the world by small sailing vessels, that only reached it at long and irregular intervals, the originator of the "'ology scheme" was obliged to wait nearly two months before learning the fate of her several ventures. During this time Allan became very curious concerning his sister's ever-increasing accumulation of what he termed "trash." He could not conceive the object of her collections, and at times it did seem to his ignorance that she might be employing herself in some more profitable manner. Once, on coming home tired out with his own hard day's work, and finding the table covered with a litter of dried grasses that Bessie was busily sorting, instead of being spread for supper, he exclaimed: —

"I say, Bess! don't you think you might be doing something useful in the way of helping mother or me, instead of wasting your time over this foolishness?"

"Why, Allan," replied the girl with quick tears starting to her eyes at his unusual tone, "I

am trying to be useful, indeed I am; and I was so busy that I hadn't an idea it was so late. If you only knew! and I've half a mind to tell you right now."

"Oh, well," came the ungracious answer, "save it till after supper, and let's have that as quick as you can, for I'm as hungry as a bear, and one that's been hard at work all day, too," he added significantly.

After supper, as Allan did not revert to the subject, Bessie also kept silent concerning it, and so her secret plans and hopes remained unrevealed to her brother for some time longer. With Halissee's help she removed all her treasures to the Indian camp, where they were stored in the hut Ul-we had built for his sister's own use. Seeing no more of them, and not being obliged to wait for his supper again, Allan congratulated himself that his reproof had brought Miss Bess to her senses, and put an end to her useless pottering with all sorts of trashy litter.

CHAPTER XX.

PRACTICAL RESULTS OF AN EDUCATION.

At length, after weeks of weary waiting, and when even Bessie had almost given up hope of ever hearing from her several ventures, there came a day of joyful surprises. It was after dark when Allan, who had gone down the river on an errand, returned, bringing such a quantity of mail matter as had never before come through the little Coochee post-office to one person. Some of it was addressed "E. Lawton, Esq.," and some to "Miss Elizabeth Lawton"; but the bulk of it came swiftly to "Collector." The post-master had found difficulty in persuading Allan that all of this was intended for his sister; and when the bewildered boy entered the houseboat and threw down his arm-ful of letters, papers, and packages, he exclaimed:

"Look here, Besty, explain this mystery, if you can! I told the post-office people that I knew they had made some mistake, but they insisted that it was all for you, and so I had to bring it along. What do you suppose it means?"

"My 'ologies! my 'ologies!" cried the excited

girl. "Here are all the answers at last. Come quick, mother, and help open them!"

Supper was late enough in the houseboat *Skimmer* that night; for not until the very last letter of all this astonishing accumulation of mail matter was opened, did any one of the homesteaders have a thought for anything else. Most of the letters addressed to "Collector" were disappointments, being merely offers to exchange Northern or foreign for Southern curios. Several of them, however, contained bank bills, and requests for certain specified articles to be sent in return; while one of them was of such an interesting nature that it is worthy of being given in full. It read:

"*Dear Collector:*

Noting your advertisement in the —— *Weekly*, I write to ask for your name, and some reference by which your business integrity may be established. If this is satisfactory I will send you an order amounting to at least one hundred dollars, and perhaps more. I have a small collection of curios, but it lacks several of the most important articles mentioned in your advertisement. I am especially desirous of obtaining perfect skeletons of a crocodile, and an alligator, besides a pair of sharks' jaws, a manatee skull, and a few eggs of

the everglade kite. I have reasons for being greatly interested in your section of country. Address,

Yours very truly,

DR. F. S. BROMLEY,

5th Avenue, New York City.

"Whe-e-ew!" whistled Allan on hearing this letter. "It begins to look as though the tomato business wasn't in it! I declare, Besty, I think I'd better resign, and let you run the business end of this homestead hereafter."

There was just a shade of jealousy in the boy's tone, which the loving ear of his sister was quick to catch.

"You dear old goose!" she cried. "As if I could run it anywhere but to destruction, without your help! I have known so all the time, too; but I wanted to make sure that there was something in it before bothering you with it. Now how do you suppose I could get crocodiles and alligators and sharks and such creatures? If you don't take right hold of it, the scheme will be a dead failure; that's all!"

"Well, it shan't be a failure if I can aid it to a successful issue," replied Allan heartily. "Your scheme is one of the very best I ever heard of, and I am proud of you for having thought it out.

I want to tell you right now too how ashamed I am for having thought you idle, and of calling your collections 'trash.' Do you know, though, what an everglade kite is?. I don't."

"Yes, of course. It's more common name is 'snail hawk,' and it is one of the rarest of birds. I shouldn't wonder if we would have to get Ul-we to help us there. Halissee is already interested in the scheme, and is doing splendid work; so, if we take in Ul-we, too, we'll have to call ourselves a company. You shall be president, and momsey shall be treasurer, and I'll be secretary, and Ul-we and Halissee will be active members. Oh, isn't it perfectly splendid?"

One of the packages, which was not opened until after the others had been examined, was found to contain a dozen rare rose bushes, and a note from the nurseryman stating that they were sent in exchange for the samples of South Florida products forwarded to him. He also said that he should be pleased to exchange any seeds, flowers, shrubs, or trees, on his list for as many more of the same as they chose to send him.

"What a chance to stock the homestead!" cried Allan.

"Isn't it?" answered Bessie.

From the woman's exchange came a letter enclosing a two-dollar bill, and asking for as many

more cards of algae and everglade grasses as Miss Lawton could furnish.

Last, but not least, was a package containing a quantity of blank cards, and an order from the manufacturer of Easter devices, for five hundred leaves of the Resurrection fern, each to be sewed to a card and forwarded at earliest date. For these he would pay two and one half cents each, or twelve dollars and a half in all.

The following month was the busiest the big cypress homesteaders and their Indian friends had ever known. Although the services of Allan and Ul-we were not yet needed in behalf of the 'ology scheme, no definite order for such things as they alone could obtain having been received, they were fully occupied with their fields, and in hunting and fishing to supply the larders of their respective families. The two girls, with little Kowik-a to help them, were also kept as busy as bees, filling the various orders that had come by that first mail.

All of the money received by it had been immediately invested in further advertising, as was that paid for the first lot of Easter cards. In the meantime another order had come in for one thousand more of these. This, and many other similar orders, were nearly filled, and a great amount of prepared material was collected in Hal-

issee's hut, which was still the headquarters of the "Supply Department," as Bessie called it.

One day, when all these things were nearly ready for shipment, the promotor of the scheme begged Allan to persuade Ul-we to go with him out to the reef and catch a large shark. "I want to send its jaws to that New York doctor," she said, "to show him that we are reliable, and mean business. You know I wrote at once, telling him who we were, and referring him to Dr. King; but he hasn't sent a word in answer yet."

So the two young men went, and were gone more than a week, for they had not only to capture a shark of the largest size, but to clean and prepare its jaws. When at length they returned with a fine specimen, beautifully clean and white, they were greeted, as they landed at the foot of the big cypress, with a startling tale of outrage and disaster. Bessie, who for days had been anxiously waiting for their coming, met them at the river bank.

"Oh! I am so thankful you have come back!" she cried. "It seemed as though you never would, and we've had such an awful time! The very day you left some men came and surveyed all of Ul-we's land, and took possession of it, and turned out his mother and Halissee and the rest, they are up in our hut now, and burned the camp

with all our collections in it, and have put up a house, and are living there, and claiming the place as their homestead. I told them what I thought of them, and so did mother, and then they filled up the ditch so that any water wouldn't get to our field, and I'm afraid all your tomatoes are dying, Allan. And Mr. Algrove has sent word that the note mother gave to Hiram was made out wrong, and that she must give him another; and, oh, dear! it's perfectly — "

Here the girl suddenly paused in her recital, frightened by the expression on Ul-we's face.

CHAPTER XXI.

DISCOVERED IN A BOWERY MUSEUM.

WHILE the Lawtons were thus making so brave a struggle to secure a home on the edge of the Florida everglades, a curious chain of circumstances, in which they would have been deeply interested had they known of them, was being linked together in the far-away city of New York. Not only that, but the several links that were, eventually, to unite in a perfect chain were being formed in such far different places, that it would have seemed absurd to suppose there could be any connection between them. One of these places was the flashiest of Bowery dime museums; another was a stately though old-fashioned mansion near the lower end of Fifth Avenue, and the third was a public asylum for the insane on one of the East River islands.

In the first-named of these places, the principal attraction of that season, according to the gaudily printed and luridly worded show bills displayed about its entrance, was a South American sea-cow that had been brought, at vast expense, from the

unexplored regions of the upper Amazon. With it came its native attendant, a Juracca Indian, positively the first of his race ever brought to this country. "Greatest of living wonders! Unparalleled attractions! Procured at an outlay of money that would paralyze a Gould, an Astor, or a Vanderbilt! Barnum could show nothing like it! The sea-cow is the most monstrous of monsters! The Juracca is possessed of such astounding eyesight that he can see all ways at once without moving his head!"

The throngs of spectators, who by day and by night crowded the museum to gaze upon these marvels, were not, for a wonder, at all disappointed. In a huge tank of water they saw a mighty beast, the like of which had never before been exhibited in a dime museum. Beside it, painted in stripes, clad in a scanty robe of feathers, and armed with a gigantic spear guaranteed to be tipped with deadly venom, stood a black man of such dreadful appearance as to cause a shudder in all beholders. The eyes that gleamed from beneath his matted shock of coarse, black hair seemed, indeed, to look in several directions at once. It was whispered that, while this frightful being ate nothing but raw meat, and drank only the milk of the sea-cow, his favorite food was human flesh, that of infants being preferred. So

the fame of these wonders spread until it attracted many persons who would no more have thought of visiting a Bowery museum under ordinary circumstances than they would of taking up their abode in a Bowery lodging-house.

Among these was a young doctor who, to some of his friends at least, was as much of a curiosity himself as was ever exhibited. While he was possessed of such wealth that he had no need to practise his profession, he worked as hard at it as though his daily bread depended upon his efforts. Never, though, did he accept payment for his services, and he only sought such cases as had been pronounced incurable by other physicians, or were attended by very unusual circumstances. He made a specialty of mental troubles that were out of the ordinary run, and always cared for one or more such patients in his own house, where he could study them under most favorable conditions. In fact, his beautiful home was a combination of hospital, asylum, and museum, for the succor of sick and poverty-stricken humanity, and a gathering place of curious things from all parts of the world, for he was an ardent collector as well as a skilled physician. This young doctor had one other peculiarity that caused his friends constant anxiety. According to their ideas, he did not know how to spend money. Whenever he bought

a horse it was some poor, starved creature, just ready to drop from weakness, abuse, or overwork. He would make such purchases in the busiest streets, lead the forlorn animals away, and eventually have them turned out to pasture on a great farm that he owned a few miles beyond the city limits. He even bought caged eagles, and mocking-birds, and all sorts of feathered captives, just for the fun of setting them free. Thus he certainly was a very queer doctor, as every one said. One day, as he was returning from a visit to a poor tenement-house child, whose crooked back he was trying to straighten, his eye was caught by the flaming notice of a Bowery museum. A sea-cow, or at least, the skeleton of one, was something that he wished to add to his collection; while an Indian whose eyes could see all ways at once of course aroused his professional curiosity.

"Another fraud, of course," said the doctor to himself, "but possibly worth investigating." A moment later found him standing before the "Juracca" Indian, and staring straight into his curious eyes.

"Bad case of strabismus," thought the doctor. "Wonder what nationality he is?"

Stepping close to the Indian, and pointing to the animal in the tank, he asked, in an ordinary tone of voice, "What is his name?"

"Lord Alfred," answered the ferocious Juracca, promptly.

"Ah! I thought so! You speak English very well."

"Boo goora goora gab noo kooka," mumbled the other as an apprehensive expression flitted across his painted face.

"All right," said the doctor laughing. "Come up to my house any evening, and I'll straighten those eyes for you." So saying he slipped a card into the Indian's hand.

At the same moment an angry voice behind him exclaimed: "Stand back, sir! No one is allowed near that savage cannibal. He's too dangerous, and it's no use your talking to him, for he doesn't understand a word of English, or any other language except his own monkey lingo."

"So I have just discovered," remarked the doctor with a pleasant irony. "And I am sorry, for I should like to engage him as interpreter the next time I go up the Amazon."

"Well, he wouldn't do you no good."

"Evidently not," replied the man of medicine as he walked away.

"What did that swell cove say to you?" demanded the man of the Indian after the doctor had passed out of hearing.

"Said if I'd come to him he'd fix my eyes."

"Yes, and charge you a hundred dollars for doing it, besides knocking you out of your job here! Do you suppose I'd have any use for you if it wasn't for them squint eyes of yourn? Not much, I wouldn't, and if you know what's for your own good you'll keep as far away from doctor chaps as you can, that's my advice."

Nevertheless, the "Juracca" cast many a furtive glance at the bit of pasteboard he had succeeded in concealing from Mr. Glure's sharp eyes, and felt that he had at length found one person in that pitilessly bewildering city to whom he could apply for aid in an emergency.

Hiram had not had a very pleasant time since reaching New York, and would have left the city long ago but for two very important reasons. One was that he had no money. By various pretexts, Mr. Glure had postponed the date for paying what he owed, until Hiram was almost in despair of ever getting it. At one time the museum man would silence him with a promise and at another with a threat. He had offered the young Floridian forty dollars per month and board, to continue his care of the manatee until it should become accustomed to its new surroundings. Then, as the months passed by, he threatened not to pay the boy one cent if he dared think of leaving the museum during "Lord Alfred's" lifetime.

Hiram's salary was regularly credited to him on the books, and with an occasional sight of this proof of his employer's sincerity, he was forced to be content.

His other reason for not attempting to escape from his disagreeable position was that, being a particularly tender-hearted chap, he had become sincerely attached to the helpless animal who was so dependent on him, and he could not bear the thought of leaving his ungainly pet to the harsh mercies of strangers.

He rarely ventured outside the museum, and then only late at night, because the black pigment with which his body was covered would not wash off, because he had no clothes save those in which he had left home, and for fear of getting lost. So, altogether, the poor lad was in a most unhappy predicament.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CASE OF MNEMONICS.

NOT long after his visit to the Bowery museum, the eccentric doctor received a note from one of his friends, a physician in charge of the city insane asylum, that read as follows: —

"*Dear Bromley:*

I have a case that is exactly in your line. An elderly gentleman who had evidently wandered from his home while suffering from a temporary derangement was picked up in the streets some months ago. He had been robbed of everything, including most of his clothing, so that no clue to his identity was left. For many weeks he lay at death's door. Now that he is on the fair road to recovery, his mind is perfectly clear, but he is absolutely without memory. Perhaps, though, I should not express it exactly in that way; for whenever he sees a familiar object or hears a new word, the sense of its use or meaning instantly returns to him, and is retained in his mind. The time has come when we must discharge him from the asylum; but what will become of him, unless,

indeed, your broad charity can be made to embrace his case, I cannot imagine.''

Of course, Dr. Bromley instantly accepted this charge, and caused the patient to be brought to his own house and surrounded by every comfort. The stranger was called "Mr. Nemo," while awaiting the chance that should bring to his ears the name to which he was entitled. He proved so gentle, lovable, and companionable a character, that, in the interest of studying his case, the doctor temporarily overlooked many of his former pursuits.

One evening he was seated in his library together with Mr. Nemo, whose mental strength he was testing by a skilfully conducted conversation, when there came a ring at the door-bell. A minute later a tidy maid appeared at the library door in a state of violent excitement.

"Please, doctor!'' she exclaimed, "there's the awfulest creeter on the stoop, asking for you. He's a striped black man, with red hair, and eyes that gives one the cold shivers. He has one of your cards, or I'd er slammed the door in his face, he's that wicked looking.''

"Show him in here, and let us see him," said the doctor calmly; but even his composure was startled by the apparition that presented itself when this command was obeyed.

"Who are you? and what do you want?" he demanded sharply.

"I'm the manertee man," answered the extraordinary-looking individual. "I didn't want to come this way, but it wouldn't wash off, and I hadn't nowheres else to go. Mr. Glure, he's run away, and took all the money with him, and the freaks is most starved, and the steam was shut off this morning, and the water got so cold that Lord Alfred's dead, and I most wish I was too. Your card's the only thing I had left, and you seemed so kind, I thought I'd try it."

As he thus briefly described the sad fate of his pet, the speaker's queer-looking eyes filled with tears, and he stood nervously twisting his cap, the very picture of grotesque misery.

"My poor lad!" exclaimed the sympathetic doctor. "So you are the Juracca Indian from South America, and —"

"No, sir! I ain't no Injun, and I ain't from South America, neither. That's all a fake of Glure's, and I didn't want to help it out, but he made me. He said that was a part of the contract, and he wouldn't pay me a cent if I didn't. My name is Hiram Algrove, and I'm from Coochee, in South Florida, and I only came up here with Cap'n Bagg's manertee, expecting to go straight back again as soon as I got the money for it, and

my ticket. Now Glure's cleared out, and I haven't got a cent, and I don't know how to get home, or what to do."

"You have, at any rate, taken the first step in the right direction by coming here," said Dr. Bromley, heartily, "and I should say the next thing was to let me fix a bath that will take off that 'Juracca' color. Then, if you will let me, I'll straighten those eyes of yours. It's a very simple operation, though it will hurt a little, of course. I know you won't mind a bit of pain, though, if it will make your eyes as straight as mine are."

"Oh, no, sir; you might half kill me, and I wouldn't mind, if it would make my eyes straight. But can you really, sir? Can you truly do it?"

"I truly can," replied the doctor smiling at the poor fellow's pathetic earnestness. "But let me see, didn't you say you were from a place called Coochee, in Florida?"

"Yes, sir; that's my home, and I wish I was there now, for if I stay up here much longer I'm afraid I'll be froze dead same's poor Lord Alfred is. Was you ever there, sir?"

"No, but I should like to visit that country immensely. I am interested in a railroad company that owns some land down there, near the

everglades. Perhaps you can tell me something about it. Just look at this map a minute."

Although Dr. Bromley's object was principally to reassure the lad and set him at ease, he was also really desirous of obtaining some information concerning a large tract of South Florida land in which he had recently become interested.

Thus, a few moments later, he and the friendless youth who had not come in vain to him for aid, were leaning together over a table on which was spread a large land map of South Florida, and the latter was delightedly pointing out familiar places in the vicinity of the home that now seemed so dear to him.

"There's the Coochee! and here's where I live!" he exclaimed.

"And what do you know about the land up here?" asked the doctor pointing to a spot higher up on the river.

"That's Injun land. English Billy lives there, and the Big Cypress place is next. Some folks named Lawton have homesteaded it, and that's why I'm up here, trying to earn money enough to pay back what my father charged 'em for me working with 'em, when I never meant to take pay for friendship, nor knowed anything about it, till he done it."

Without attempting to follow this very involved

explanation, Dr. Bromley was saying to himself: "Lawton? Lawton? Why, that is the name of the young woman I have been corresponding with about crocodiles, and everglade kites, and the very one old Dr. King wrote me such a long letter about." Then aloud he asked, "Do you happen to know a Miss Elizabeth Lawton?"

Before Hiram could answer, they were both startled by a half-stifled but joyous exclamation from Mr. Nemo, who had been a quiet though intensely interested spectator of their interview, but who now cried, "Lawton! Lawton! That is my name! I am John Lawton!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAR THREATENED AND AVERTED.

"I WILL kill them!" hissed the young Seminole through his clenched teeth. "The white man who steals the land and burns the house of the Ista-Chatte must die!"

All the uncontrolled passions of generations of savage ancestors who had fought to the death but never yielded were leaping and seething in Ul-we's breast, aroused into fullest fury by the tale of outrage to which he had just listened. His face was swollen and distorted by rage; and, seizing his rifle as he spoke, he turned toward the forest. Had no restraining influence been at hand, he would certainly have carried out his threat and the result would have been fearful to contemplate. A struggle of desperation on one side and pitiless extermination on the other would have drenched that fair Southern land with blood, and swept it with the flames of war.

"Hold on, old man! Wait a moment!" exclaimed Allan, laying a detaining hand on his friend's arm; but, with a muttered threat, the

Indian flung the white lad aside and leaped forward.

"Ul-we! Oh Ul-we!" cried Bessie Lawton, from whose face every trace of color had fled, and with a voice piteous in its pleading intensity. She might as well have entreated the wind to stop its blowing.

A second bound carried the infuriated youth to the edge of the timber. Another, and he would have disappeared within its shadows. Ere he could take the fatal step he was met by a pale-faced woman who barred the narrow trail and bade him halt. He could not pass her, nor could he brush her aside. She was the sole representative of the hated race whose right to detain him he acknowledged. By words and deeds she had proved herself the friend of the Ista-Chatte, and to her voice even his savage instinct bade him listen.

"If you have gone on the warpath, Ul-we," she said firmly, "you must kill me and my children first. Our friendship demands that you do not leave us to be tortured by the cruel hands of those whom you are about to arouse. Here I stand: shoot me first, and then these others. Then your course will be clear, and there will be no white friends left behind to hamper your actions. Shoot, I say! Shoot quick! You have no time to lose!"

Motionless, dumb, and with downcast eyes, the young Indian stood before her.

"Why do you hesitate? Are you afraid? If you are to kill one, you must kill all within your reach. You might as well kill your own mother, and Halissee, and little Ko-wik-a, also; for, if you shed one drop of white blood, they will surely fall beneath the white man's vengeance. Why do you not begin at once? If you are going to declare war you have much to do, and time is precious. Is your gun empty? Give it to me that I may load it for you!"

So saying, Mrs. Lawton reached out and took the Indian's rifle from his unresisting hand. Then her voice changed, and with a tone of infinite compassion, she said:

"My poor boy! I see that you know of what has taken place, and I do not wonder that you feel as you do. I could hardly blame you for acting as your instinct suggests, and meting out to those men the punishment they so richly deserve. But it may not be. You have others to consider beside yourself, your family, your people, and your friends, to all of whom your act would bring suffering and death. No, Ul-we, there must be no thought of killing, no thought of war. For a time you must submit to see your lands held by those who have stolen them, as the weak must

always submit to the oppression of the strong. But only for a time. If you will give me your word not to set foot on your land so long as those white men remain in possession of it, and never to raise a weapon against them, I will pledge you mine that every foot of it shall be restored to you. It shall be yours to have and to hold, so long as you live, or until you choose to relinquish it of your own free will."

"How can it be?" asked the young Seminole looking up and speaking for the first time.

"I do not know how," answered Mrs. Lawton. "I only know that, if I promise it, I shall be shown the way to accomplish what I have promised. Is it a bargain, Ul-we? Will you shake hands on it?"

For a moment the Indian's gaze searched the very soul of the white woman, and then he gave her his hand.

"It is a treaty," he said simply, "and what the Ista-Chatte says, that will he do."

"It is a treaty," answered Mrs. Lawton solemnly, "and, with God's help, I will fulfil my part of it as faithfully as you fulfil yours. Here is your gun, and now you must go to your mother and sister who are very anxious concerning you. Come and see us again in the morning, and remember that this land of the big cypress and

this home is yours to share with us so long as you may need it."

As the Seminole disappeared in the direction of the place where his loved ones awaited him, Mrs. Lawton leaned, weak and trembling, on the arm of her own son, who had been a silent witness of this memorable interview, and walked, with unsteady steps, in the direction of the little house-boat.

"Why, mother!" he exclaimed, "what is the matter? I was just thinking how brave and strong you were, and what a splendid soldier you would make."

"O Allan, it was that awful gun! I expected it to go off every minute that I held it, and I don't see why it didn't. Tell Bessie to hurry and make me a cup of tea."

Allan was almost as furious at the outrage perpetrated during his absence, not only upon his friend, but upon himself, as was Ul-we, and his mother found the task of persuading him to submit to it with patience a most difficult one. It was, indeed, hard to have the labor of months ruthlessly destroyed. The very fact that Allan's tomato plants had gained their vigorous growth through an unstinted supply of water caused them to droop the more quickly when it was withheld, and rendered them less able to stand a drought

than if they had been raised in a dry soil from the first.

In vain did Allan hope for rain. None came to relieve the deadly drought. Day after day, from an unclouded sky, the sun poured down its pitiless heat on the drooping plants, until leaves and fruit began to fall from the shrunken stems.

At length, in his despair, Allan went to the man who, by virtue of his claim to Ul-we's land, controlled the irrigating ditch, and humbling his pride, begged him to again turn on the life-giving waters.

"If I don't get a crop from that tomato field, we won't be able to meet a note my mother gave to Mr. Algrove, and which will soon fall due," he concluded.

"Can't do it, my boy," answered the man. "Every one must look out for himself in this country, and I need every drop of water I can get for my own crop. Them lazy Injuns didn't dig the ditch wide enough in the first place, and so now one of us must suffer for their idleness. I can tell you one thing for your comfort, though, Algrove don't hold no note of yourn. His squinty-eyed boy carried it off with him when he run away, and nothing haint been heard from him sence. So you can rest easy on that score."

When Allan reported this to his mother, he

added, "Now I understand what Hiram meant when he wrote that we needn't worry about the note, nor try to pay it until he came back. I declare! I begin to think he wasn't such a bad fellow, after all. Now old Algrove may whistle for his money till we get good and ready to pay it."

"Don't talk that way, Allan," said Mrs. Lawton reprovingly, "for I know you don't mean it. You know as well as I do, that our obligation to Mr. Algrove remains just the same whether that bit of paper is in his hands or not. How often have I heard you repeat your father's motto, 'The Lawton word is as good as the Lawton bond,' and declare that it made you feel proud of being a Lawton?"

"And I am proud of it!" exclaimed the boy, "and my father's motto shall be my motto, and we will pay old Algrove every cent just as quick as we can. It will be lots easier to make terms with him, though, and arrange for a new note, if he can't produce the old one. Yes, Hiram certainly is a trump, and if it wasn't for his crooked eyes, I believe I could really become fond of the fellow."

When it was finally admitted that nothing was to be hoped for from the tomato crop, the entire attention of these busy workers was turned

towards Bessie's 'ology scheme, which promised more immediate returns than anything else they could think of. It too had received a severe blow in the destruction of the Easter cards, which, with many other things almost ready for shipment, had been stored in the Indian camp; and now it was too late to do anything for Easter. Still there were other orders that could be filled, and others might be hoped for.

"If that stupid doctor man would only send us the one hundred dollar order he so good as promised," said Bessie, "what a help it would be."

"An idea!" cried Allan. "Why not collect the things he mentioned, and have them all ready to send off the minute the order does come? It will save lots of time, and if he doesn't want them, some one else will, so they won't be wasted anyway."

This suggestion was considered such a good one, and it was also deemed so advisable to cause Ul-we to forget his troubles as far as possible in active employment, that he and Allan were sent into the everglades to search for snail hawks and their eggs, alligators, and rare orchids. At the same time the girls and little Ko-wik-a worked like beavers at collecting and arranging such items of their stock in trade as could be found nearer home.

While the Lawtons were thus straining every nerve to meet their note, the date on which it would fall due drew very near, and every day they expected to hear that Hiram had returned with the dreaded bit of paper in his possession.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RAVELLED THREADS RE-UNITED.

In pursuance of her promise to Ul-we, Mrs. Lawton wrote letters descriptive of the state of Indian affairs in South Florida, to influential persons in every direction. It so happened that one of these, after passing through several hands, came to the notice of the eccentric New York doctor into whose kindly care Hiram Algrove had so strangely fallen, and decided him to carry out at once a plan that he had already formed.

When Allan and Ul-we returned from their everglade trip, laden with trophies of that watery wilderness, it was found to be necessary that another expedition should be undertaken to the outer reefs and banks of the coast, to procure a quantity of the marine curiosities that correspondents of the 'ology scheme were demanding. As this promised to occupy considerable time, and as no one wanted to be left behind, it was decided that, with the first fair wind, the "Skimmer of the seas," accompanied by Ul-we's great open-water dug-out, should be sailed across the bay, to a

small outlying key or island. On this the Indians could make a camp, and as the Lawtons would have their house with them, all hands could remain there comfortably as long as they pleased.

Thus it happened that when, a few days later, a fine naphtha launch, bearing on its bows in letters of gold, the name "Lord Alfred," arrived from Key West, and sped merrily up the Coochee to the place of the big cypress, its occupants were sadly disappointed to find the Lawton homestead deserted. Retracing their course to the mouth of the river, the launch was tied up for the night at the wharf from which Hiram Algrove had set forth into the world four months before.

The following day the launch again started out, as though for the outer keys of the reef, and it was nearly sunset ere it slowed down, and finally dropped anchor just off the little island on which our homesteaders and their Seminole friends had temporarily established themselves.

All of these suspended their busy occupations and gathered on the beach to witness the astonishing spectacle of such a craft in those waters, where its like had never before been seen. The "Lord Alfred" was hardly anchored, before a light skiff, containing two persons, shot away from it, and was rowed swiftly to the shore. From it stepped a gentleman, who, with a searching glance at the

motley group, lifted his cap to the ladies, and said, "Mrs. Lawton, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Miss Elizabeth Lawton?"

"That is my daughter's name; but you have an advantage of us, for I do not remember having met you before, sir."

"You have not; but perhaps this letter will serve as a sort of an introduction."

With this he handed the bewildered woman one of her own letters written some time before to an official in Washington, in behalf of the Florida Seminoles in general, and of Ul-we in particular.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawton glancing at it, "Are you Senator ——?"

"No, madam, I have not that honor; but I am one of the directors and the authorized land agent of the Florida and West Indian Railway Company, on a portion of whose land grant the Indian particularly mentioned in this letter, has, as I understand it, until recently, been living. I also understand that he has been driven from it by certain parties who made the mistake of believing it to be government land, and so open to homestead entry. Now, as our company consider the Seminoles to be one of the chief attractions in the eyes of tourists of this portion of Florida, we are most anxious to have them remain in their present

settlements. I am, therefore, authorized to offer to this particular Indian, through you, a free deed to the land he has heretofore occupied, upon condition that he and his family shall continue to reside upon it."

"Do you mean it?" cried Mrs. Lawton joyfully. "Can it be true? Ul-we, do you hear? Your land is restored to you, and is yours to have and to hold from this time forth. You have nobly kept your part of the treaty, and now through the kindness of this gentleman I am enabled to keep mine. This is the young Indian of whom I wrote, sir. Ul-we, speak for yourself, and say how gladly you accept the condition imposed by Mr. ——"

"Dr. Fred Bromley, at your service," said the stranger smiling, and again lifting his cap with one hand, while the other was extended to the stalwart young Seminole.

"Why!" exclaimed Bessie.

"Yes, Miss Elizabeth Lawton," laughed the doctor, turning to the blushing girl, "I must confess to being your tardy correspondent. Now, to make a poor amends for my inexcusable delay, I wish to order one hundred and fifty-two dollars' worth of your Florida curios, and to tender this note in advance payment for the same."

With this he handed the amazed originator of the 'ology scheme the identical note given by her

mother to Mr. Algrove four months before. It was endorsed, "payment received in full with interest," and signed, "Joel Algrove."

"But I don't understand it at all," said Bessie, in a very puzzled tone, as she hesitatingly handed the note to her mother.

"It is very simple," replied the doctor. "Mr. Algrove gave me that note, last evening, as a fee for professional services rendered to his son."

"His son," cried Allan, no longer able to refrain from having a share in these extraordinary developments. "Do you know Hiram Algrove, sir? Has he come back? I wish you had brought him out here with you, for he is one of our best friends. I hope he hasn't been ill."

"Then you didn't recognize him, after all!" laughed the doctor.

Stepping aside as he spoke, he exposed to their view the other occupant of the skiff who had remained in the background, but now faced them. He was a sturdy, neatly dressed lad, with red hair and freckles; but with honest blue eyes that looked Allan straight in the face.

"It can't be!" cried the latter gazing keenly into them. "It is, though, I declare! It is Hiram Algrove, and his eyes are as straight as mine. Will you shake hands with me, and forgive me, and be my friend, old fellow?"

"Then you don't believe any longer that I worked with you for pay in money?" asked the other, as he gladly grasped Allan's extended hand.

"Indeed I don't," answered the young homesteader heartily. "No fellow with as honest a pair of eyes as yours could do such a thing."

"Now, madam," said this wonderful doctor, after Hiram had been warmly greeted and congratulated by all his friends, "I have another companion on the launch who fancies that he has already met you, though he is not certain. Have I your permission to invite him on shore?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Lawton. "We shall be only too happy to meet any friend of one who has proved himself so friendly to us. In the meantime, won't you step into our little floating house?"

So, while Hiram rowed out to the launch to fetch its remaining passenger, Dr. Bromley and the Lawtons entered the houseboat, one end of which rested on the beach. Here the former expressed a lively interest in the many rare and curious things that it contained.

While they were exhibiting these to him, a choking cry at the door caused them all to look up. A gray-haired man stood there. His face wore a startled look, and he seemed gasping for breath. In another instant Mrs. Lawton had

flung herself into his arms, and was sobbing with an overwhelming joy.

"My wife, and my children! Thank God! Thank God!" exclaimed the lost one who was thus marvellously found. No longer was his mind clouded. No longer was he a homeless wanderer. Far from the scenes of his suffering and despair, he was once more restored to his loved ones, and again he had found a home.

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